ELSIE VENNER:

A ROMANCE OF DESTINY.

By OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST-TABLE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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ELSIE VENNER.

CHAPTER XVII.

OLD SOPHY CALLS ON THE REVEREND DOCTOR.

The two meeting-houses which faced each other like a pair of fighting-cocks had not flapped their wings or crowed at each other for a considerable time. The Reverend Mr. Fairweather had been dyspeptic and low-spirited of late, and was too languid for controversy. The Reverend Doctor Honeywood had been very busy with his benevolent associations, and had discoursed chiefly on practical matters, to the neglect of special doctrinal subjects. His senior deacon ventured to say to him that some of his people required to be reminded of the great fundamental doctrine of the worthlessness of all human efforts and motives. Some of them were altogether too much pleased with the success of the Temperance Society and the Association for the Relief of the Poor. There was a pestilent heresy about, concerning the satisfaction to be derived from a good conscience, — as if anybody ever did anything

which was not to be hated, loathed, despised and condemned.

The old minister listened gravely, with an inward smile, and told his deacon that he would attend to his suggestion. After the deacon had gone, he tumbled over his manuscripts, until at length he came upon his first-rate old sermon on "Human Nature." He had read a great deal of hard theology, and had at last reached that curious state which is so common in good ministers, — that, namely, in which they contrive to switch off their logical faculties on the narrow side-track of their technical dogmas, while the great freight-train of their substantial human qualities keeps in the main highway of common-sense, in which kindly souls are always found by all who approach them by their human side.

The Doctor read his sermon with a pleasant, paternal interest: it was well argued from his premises. Here and there he dashed his pen through a harsh expression. Now and then he added an explanation or qualified a broad statement. But his mind was on the logical side-track, and he followed the chain of reasoning without fairly perceiving where it would lead him, if he carried it into real life.

He was just touching up the final proposition, when his granddaughter, Letty, once before referred to, came into the room with her smiling face and lively movement. Miss Letty or Letitia Forrester was a city-bred girl of some fifteen or

sixteen years old, who was passing the summer with her grandfather for the sake of country air and quiet. It was a sensible arrangement; for, having the promise of figuring as a belle by-and-by, and being a little given to dancing, and having a voice which drew a pretty dense circle around the piano when she sat down to play and sing, it was hard to keep her from being carried into society before her time, by the mere force of mutual attraction. Fortunately, she had some quiet as well as some social tastes, and was willing enough to pass two or three of the summer months in the country, where she was much better bestowed than she would have been at one of those watering-places where so many half-formed girls get prematurely hardened in the vice of self-consciousness.

Miss Letty was altogether too wholesome, hearty, and high-strung a young girl to be a model, according to the flat-chested and cachectic pattern which is the classical type of certain excellent young females, often the subjects of biographical memoirs. But the old minister was proud of his granddaughter for all that. She was so full of life, so graceful, so generous, so vivacious, so ready always to do all she could for him and for everybody, so perfectly frank in her avowed delight in the pleasures which this miserable world offered her in the shape of natural beauty, of poetry, of music, of companionship, of books, of cheerful coöperation in the tasks of

those about her, that the Reverend Doctor could not find it in his heart to condemn her because she was deficient in those particular graces and that signal other-worldliness he had sometimes noticed in feeble young persons suffering from various chronic diseases which impaired their vivacity and removed them from the range of temptation.

When Letty, therefore, came bounding into the old minister's study, he glanced up from his manuscript, and, as his eye fell upon her, it flashed across him that there was nothing so very monstrous and unnatural about the specimen of congenital perversion he was looking at, with his features opening into their pleasantest sunshine. Technically, according to the fifth proposition of the sermon on Human Nature, very bad, no doubt. Practically, according to the fact before him, a very pretty piece of the Creator's handiwork, body and soul. Was it not a conceivable thing that the divine grace might show itself in different forms in a fresh young girl like Letitia, and in that poor thing he had visited yesterday, half-grown, half-colored, in bed for the last year with hip-disease? Was it to be supposed that this healthy young girl, with life throbbing all over her, *could*, without a miracle, be good according to the invalid pattern and formula?

And yet there were mysteries in human nature which pointed to some tremendous perversion of its tendencies, — to some profound, radical vice

of moral constitution, native or transmitted, as you will have it, but positive, at any rate, as the leprosy, breaking out in the blood of races, guard them ever so carefully. Did he not know the case of a young lady in Rockland, daughter of one of the first families in the place, a very beautiful and noble creature to look at, for whose bringing-up nothing had been spared, — a girl who had had governesses to teach her at the house, who had been indulged almost too kindly, — a girl whose father had given himself up to her, he being himself a pure and high-souled man? — and yet this girl was accused in whispers of having been on the very verge of committing a fatal crime; she was an object of fear to all who knew the dark hints which had been let fall about her, and there were some that believed —— Why, what was this but an instance of the total obliquity and degeneration of the moral principle? and to what could it be owing, but to an innate organic tendency?

"Busy, grandpapa?" said Letty, and without waiting for an answer kissed his cheek with a pair of lips made on purpose for that little function, — fine, but richly turned out, the corners tucked in with a finish of pretty dimples, the rose-bud lips of girlhood's June.

The old gentleman looked at his granddaughter. Nature swelled up from his heart in a wave that sent a glow to his cheek and a sparkle to his eye. But it is very hard to be interrupted just as

we are winding up a string of propositions with the grand conclusion which is the statement in brief of all that has gone before: our own starting-point, into which we have been trying to back our reader or listener as one backs a horse into the shafts.

"*Video meliora, proboque*, — I see the better, and approve it; *deteriora sequor*, I follow after the worse; 'tis that natural dislike to what is good, pure, holy, and true, that inrooted selfishness, totally insensible to the claims of" ——

Here the worthy man was interrupted by Miss Letty.

"Do come, if you can, grandpapa," said the young girl; "here is a poor old black woman wants to see you so much!"

The good minister was as kind-hearted as if he had never groped in the dust and ashes of those cruel old abstractions which have killed out so much of the world's life and happiness. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness"; a man's love is the measure of his fitness for good or bad company here or elsewhere. Men are tattooed with their special beliefs like so many South-Sea Islanders; but a real human heart, with Divine love in it, beats with the same glow under all the patterns of all earth's thousand tribes!

The Doctor sighed, and folded the sermon, and laid the Quarto Cruden on it. He rose from his desk, and, looking once more at the young girl's

face, forgot his logical conclusions, and said to himself that she was a little angel, — which was in violent contradiction to the leading doctrine of his sermon on Human Nature. And so he followed her out of the study into the wide entry of the old-fashioned country-house.

An old black woman sat on the plain oaken settle which humble visitors waiting to see the minister were wont to occupy. She was old, but how old it would be very hard to guess. She might be seventy. She might be ninety. One could not swear she was not a hundred. Black women remain at a stationary age (to the eyes of *white* people, at least) for thirty years. They do not appear to change during this period any more than so many Trenton trilobites. Bent up, wrinkled, yellow-eyed, with long upper-lip, projecting jaws, retreating chin, still meek features, long arms, large flat hands with uncolored palms and slightly webbed fingers, it was impossible not to see in this old creature a hint of the gradations by which life climbs up through the lower natures to the highest human developments. We cannot tell such old women's ages because we do not understand the physiognomy of a race so unlike our own. No doubt they see a great deal in each other's faces that we cannot, — changes of color and expression as real as our own, blushes and sudden betrayals of feeling, — just as these two canaries know what their single notes and short sentences and full song with this or that varia-

tion mean, though it is a mystery to us unplumed mortals.

This particular old black woman was a striking specimen of her class. Old as she looked, her eye was bright and knowing. She wore a red-and-yellow turban, which set off her complexion well, and hoops of gold in her ears, and beads of gold about her neck, and an old funeral ring upon her finger. She had that touching stillness about her which belongs to animals that wait to be spoken to and then look up with a kind of sad humility.

"Why, Sophy!" said the good minister, "is this you?"

She looked up with the still expression on her face. "It's ol' Sophy," she said.

"Why," said the Doctor, "I did not believe you could walk so far as this to save the Union. Bring Sophy a glass of wine, Letty. Wine's good for old folks like Sophy and me, after walking a good way, or preaching a good while."

The young girl stepped into the back-parlor, where she found the great pewter flagon in which the wine that was left after each communion-service was brought to the minister's house. With much toil she managed to tip it so as to get a couple of glasses filled. The minister tasted his, and made old Sophy finish hers.

"I wan' to see you 'n' talk wi' you all alone," she said presently.

The minister got up and led the way towards

his study. "To be sure," he said; he had only waited for her to rest a moment before he asked her into the library. The young girl took her gently by the arm, and helped her feeble steps along the passage. When they reached the study, she smoothed the cushion of a rocking-chair, and made the old woman sit down in it. Then she tripped lightly away, and left her alone with the minister.

Old Sophy was a member of the Reverend Doctor Honeywood's church. She had been put through the necessary confessions in a tolerably satisfactory manner. To be sure, as her grandfather had been a cannibal chief, according to the common story, and, at any rate, a terrible wild savage, and as her mother retained to the last some of the prejudices of her early education, there was a heathen flavor in her Christianity, which had often scandalized the elder of the minister's two deacons. But the good minister had smoothed matters over: had explained that allowances were to be made for those who had been long sitting without the gate of Zion, — that, no doubt, a part of the curse which descended to the children of Ham consisted in "having the understanding darkened," as well as the skin, — and so had brought his suspicious senior deacon to tolerate old Sophy as one of the communion of fellow-sinners.

—— Poor things! How little we know the

simple notions with which these rudiments of souls are nourished by the Divine Goodness! Did not Mrs. Professor come home this very blessed morning with a story of one of her old black women?

"And how do you feel to-day, Mrs. Robinson?"

"Oh, my dear, I have this singing in my head all the time." (What doctors call *tinnitus aurium*.)

"She's got a cold in the head," said old Mrs. Rider.

"Oh, no, my dear! Whatever I'm thinking about, it's all this singing, this music. When I'm thinking of the dear Redeemer, it all turns into this singing and music. When the clark came to see me, I asked him if he couldn't cure me, and he said, No, — it was the Holy Spirit in me, singing to me; and all the time I hear this beautiful music, and it's the Holy Spirit a-singing to me." ——

The good man waited for Sophy to speak; but she did not open her lips as yet.

"I hope you are not troubled in mind or body," he said to her at length, finding she did not speak.

The poor old woman took out a white handkerchief, and lifted it to her black face. She could not say a word for her tears and sobs.

The minister would have consoled her; he was used to tears, and could in most cases withstand their contagion manfully; but something choked his voice suddenly, and when he called upon it,

he got no answer, but a tremulous movement of the muscles, which was worse than silence.

At last she spoke.

"Oh, no, no, no! It's my poor girl, my darling, my beauty, my baby, that's grown up to be a woman; she will come to a bad end; she will do something that will make them kill her or shut her up all her life. Oh, Doctor, Doctor, save her, pray for her! It a'n't her fault. It a'n't her fault. If they knew all that I know, they wouldn' blame that poor child. I must tell you, Doctor: if I should die, perhaps nobody else would tell you. Massa Venner can't talk about it. Doctor Kittredge won't talk about it. Nobody but old Sophy to tell you, Doctor; and old Sophy can't die without telling you."

The kind minister soothed the poor old soul with those gentle, quieting tones which had carried peace and comfort to so many chambers of sickness and sorrow, to so many hearts overburdened by the trials laid upon them.

Old Sophy became quiet in a few minutes, and proceeded to tell her story. She told it in the low half-whisper which is the natural voice of lips oppressed with grief and fears; with quick glances around the apartment from time to time, as if she dreaded lest the dim portraits on the walls and the dark folios on the shelves might overhear her words.

It was not one of those conversations which a third person can report minutely, unless by that

miracle of clairvoyance known to the readers of stories made out of authors' brains. Yet its main character can be imparted in a much briefer space than the old black woman took to give all its details.

She went far back to the time when Dudley Venner was born, — she being then a middle-aged woman. The heir and hope of a family which had been narrowing down as if doomed to extinction, he had been surrounded with every care and trained by the best education he could have in New England. He had left college, and was studying the profession which gentlemen of leisure most affect, when he fell in love with a young girl left in the world almost alone, as he was. The old woman told the story of his young love and his joyous bridal with a tenderness which had something more, even, than her family sympathies to account for it. Had she not hanging over her bed a paper-cutting of a profile — jet black, but not blacker than the face it represented — of one who would have been her own husband in the small years of this century, if the vessel in which he went to sea, like Jamie in the ballad, had not sailed away and never come back to land? Had she not her bits of furniture stowed away which had been got ready for her own wedding, — *two* rocking-chairs, one worn with long use, one kept for him so long that it had grown a superstition with her never to sit in it, — and might he not come back yet, after all? Had she not her chest

of linen ready for her humble house-keeping, with store of serviceable huckaback and piles of neatly folded kerchiefs, wherefrom this one that showed so white against her black face was taken, for that she knew her eyes would betray her in "the presence"?

All the first part of the story the old woman told tenderly, and yet dwelling upon every incident with a loving pleasure. How happy this young couple had been, what plans and projects of improvement they had formed, how they lived in each other, always together, so young and fresh and beautiful as she remembered them in that one early summer when they walked arm in arm through the wilderness of roses that ran riot in the garden, — she told of this as loath to leave it and come to the woe that lay beneath.

She told the whole story; — shall I repeat it? Not now. If, in the course of relating the incidents I have undertaken to report, *it tells itself*, perhaps this will be better than to run the risk of producing a painful impression on some of those susceptible readers whom it would be ill-advised to disturb or excite, when they rather require to be amused and soothed. In our pictures of life, we must show the flowering-out of terrible growths which have their roots deep, deep underground. Just how far we shall lay bare the unseemly roots themselves is a matter of discretion and taste, in which none of us are infallible.

The old woman told the whole story of Elsie,

of her birth, of her peculiarities of person and disposition, of the passionate fears and hopes with which her father had watched the course of her development. She recounted all her strange ways, from the hour when she first tried to crawl across the carpet, and her father's look as she worked her way towards him. With the memory of Juliet's nurse she told the story of her teething, and how, the woman to whose breast she had clung dying suddenly about that time, they had to struggle hard with the child before she would learn the accomplishment of feeding with a spoon. And so of her fierce plays and fiercer disputes with that boy who had been her companion, and the whole scene of the quarrel when she struck him with those sharp white teeth, frightening her, old Sophy, almost to death; for, as she said, the boy would have died, if it hadn't been for the old Doctor's galloping over as fast as he could gallop and burning the places right out of his arm. Then came the story of that other incident, sufficiently alluded to already, which had produced such an ecstasy of fright and left such a nightmare of apprehension in the household. And so the old woman came down to this present time. That boy she never loved nor trusted was grown to a dark, dangerous-looking man, and he was under their roof. He wanted to marry our poor Elsie, and Elsie hated him, and sometimes she would look at him over her shoulder just as she used to look at that woman she hated; and she,

old Sophy, couldn't sleep for thinking she should hear a scream from the white chamber some night and find him in 'spasms such as that woman came so near dying with. And then there was something about Elsie she did not know what to make of: she would sit and hang her head sometimes, and look as if she were dreaming; and she brought home books they said a young gentleman up at the great school lent her; and once she heard her whisper in her sleep, and she talked as young girls do to themselves when they're thinking about somebody they have a liking for and think nobody knows it.

She finished her long story at last. The minister had listened to it in perfect silence. He sat still even when she had done speaking, — still, and lost in thought. It was a very awkward matter for him to have a hand in. Old Sophy was his parishioner, but the Venners had a pew in the Reverend Mr. Fairweather's meeting-house. It would seem that he, Mr. Fairweather, was the natural adviser of the parties most interested. Had he sense and spirit enough to deal with such people? Was there enough capital of humanity in his somewhat limited nature to furnish sympathy and unshrinking service for his friends in an emergency? or was he too busy with his own attacks of spiritual neuralgia, and too much occupied with taking account of stock of his own thin-blooded offences, to forget himself and his personal interests on the small scale and the large,

and run a risk of his life, if need were, at any rate give himself up without reserve to the dangerous task of guiding and counselling these distressed and imperilled fellow-creatures?

The good minister thought the best thing to do would be to call and talk over some of these matters with Brother Fairweather, — for so he would call him at times, especially if his senior deacon were not within earshot. Having settled this point, he comforted Sophy with a few words of counsel and a promise of coming to see her very soon. He then called his man to put the old white horse into the chaise and drive Sophy back to the mansion-house.

When the Doctor sat down to his sermon again, it looked very differently from the way it had looked at the moment he left it. When he came to think of it, he did not feel quite so sure *practically* about that matter of the utter natural selfishness of everybody. There was Letty, now, seemed to take a very *un*selfish interest in that old black woman, and indeed in poor people generally; perhaps it would not be too much to say that she was always thinking of other people. He thought he had seen other young persons naturally unselfish, thoughtful for others; it seemed to be a family trait in some he had known.

But most of all he was exercised about this poor girl whose story Sophy had been telling. If what the old woman believed was true, — and

it had too much semblance of probability, — what became of his theory of ingrained moral obliquity applied to such a case? If by the visitation of God a person receives any injury which impairs the intellect or the moral perceptions, is it not monstrous to judge such a person by our common working standards of right and wrong? Certainly, everybody will answer, in cases where there is a palpable organic change brought about, as when a blow on the head produces insanity. Fools! How long will it be before we shall learn that for every wound which betrays itself to the sight by a scar, there are a thousand unseen mutilations that cripple, each of them, some one or more of our highest faculties? If what Sophy told and believed was the real truth, what prayers could be agonizing enough, what tenderness could be deep enough, for this poor, lost, blighted, hapless, blameless child of misfortune, struck by such a doom as perhaps no living creature in all the sisterhood of humanity shared with her?

The minister thought these matters over until his mind was bewildered with doubts and tossed to and fro on that stormy deep of thought heaving forever beneath the conflict of windy dogmas. He laid by his old sermon. He put back a pile of old commentators with their eyes and mouths and hearts full of the dust of the schools. Then he opened the book of Genesis at the eighteenth chapter and read that remarkable argument of Abraham's with his Maker, in which he boldly

appeals to first principles. He took as his text, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" and began to write his sermon, afterwards so famous, — "On the Obligations of an Infinite Creator to a Finite Creature."

It astonished the good people, who had been accustomed so long to repeat mechanically their Oriental hyperboles of self-abasement, to hear their worthy minister maintaining that the dignified attitude of the old Patriarch, insisting on what was reasonable and fair with reference to his fellow-creatures, was really much more respectful to his Maker, and a great deal manlier and more to his credit, than if he had yielded the whole matter, and pretended that men had not rights as well as duties. The same logic which had carried him to certain conclusions with reference to human nature, this same irresistible logic carried him straight on from his text until he arrived at those other results, which not only astonished his people, as was said, but surprised himself. He went so far in defence of the rights of man, that he put his foot into several heresies, for which men had been burned so often, it was time, if ever it could be, to acknowledge the demonstration of the *argumentum ad ignem*. He did not believe in the responsibility of idiots. He did not believe a new-born infant was morally answerable for other people's acts. He thought a man with a crooked spine would never be called to account for not walking erect. He thought,

if the crook was in his brain, instead of his back, he could not fairly be blamed for any consequence of this natural defect, whatever lawyers or divines might call it. He argued, that, if a person inherited a perfect mind, body, and disposition, and had perfect teaching from infancy, that person could do nothing more than keep the moral law perfectly. But supposing that the Creator allows a person to be born with an hereditary or ingrafted organic tendency, and then puts this person into the hands of teachers incompetent or positively bad, is not what is called *sin* or transgression of the law necessarily involved in the premises? Is not a Creator bound to guard his children against the ruin which inherited ignorance might entail on them? Would it be fair for a parent to put into a child's hands the title-deeds to all its future possessions, and a bunch of matches? And are not men children, nay, babes, in the eye of Omniscience? — The minister grew bold in his questions. Had not he as good right to ask questions as Abraham?

This was the dangerous vein of speculation in which the Reverend Doctor Honeywood found himself involved, as a consequence of the suggestions forced upon him by old Sophy's communication. The truth was, the good man had got so humanized by mixing up with other people in various benevolent schemes, that, the very moment he could escape from his old scholastic abstractions, he took the side of humanity in-

stinctively, just as the Father of the Faithful did, — all honor be to the noble old Patriarch for insisting on the worth of an honest man, and making the best terms he could for a very ill-conditioned metropolis, which might possibly, however, have contained ten righteous people, for whose sake it should be spared!

The consequence of all this was, that he was in a singular and seemingly self-contradictory state of mind when he took his hat and cane and went forth to call on his heretical brother. The old minister took it for granted that the Reverend Mr. Fairweather knew the private history of his parishioner's family. He did not reflect that there are griefs men *never* put into words, — that there are fears which must not be spoken, — intimate matters of consciousness which must be carried, as bullets which have been driven deep into the living tissues are sometimes carried, for a whole lifetime, — *encysted* griefs, if we may borrow the chirurgeon's term, never to be reached, never to be seen, never to be thrown out, but to go into the dust with the frame that bore them about with it, during long years of anguish, known only to the sufferer and his Maker. Dudley Venner had talked with his minister about this child of his. But he had talked cautiously, feeling his way for sympathy, looking out for those indications of tact and judgment which would warrant him in some partial communication, at least, of the origin of his doubts and fears, and never finding them.

There was something about the Reverend Mr. Fairweather which repressed all attempts at confidential intercourse. What this something was, Dudley Venner could hardly say; but he felt it distinctly, and it sealed his lips. He never got beyond certain generalities connected with education and religious instruction. The minister could not help discovering, however, that there were difficulties connected with this girl's management, and he heard enough outside of the family to convince him that she had manifested tendencies, from an early age, at variance with the theoretical opinions he was in the habit of preaching, and in a dim way of holding for truth, as to the natural dispositions of the human being.

About this terrible fact of congenital obliquity his new beliefs began to cluster as a centre, and to take form as a crystal around its nucleus. Still, he might perhaps have struggled against them, had it not been for the little Roman Catholic chapel he passed every Sunday, on his way to the meeting-house. Such a crowd of worshippers, swarming into the pews like bees, filling all the aisles, running over at the door like berries heaped too full in the measure, — some kneeling on the steps, some standing on the side-walk, hats off, heads down, lips moving, some looking on devoutly from the other side of the street! Oh, could he have followed his own Bridget, maid of all work, into the heart of that steaming

throng, and bowed his head while the priests intoned their Latin prayers! could he have snuffed up the cloud of frankincense, and felt that he was in the great ark which holds the better half of the Christian world, while all around it are wretched creatures, some struggling against the waves in leaky boats, and some on ill-connected rafts, and some with their heads just above water, thinking to ride out the flood which is to sweep the earth clean of sinners, upon their own private, individual life-preservers!

Such was the present state of mind of the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather, when his clerical brother called upon him to talk over the questions to which old Sophy had called his attention.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REVEREND DOCTOR CALLS ON BROTHER FAIRWEATHER.

For the last few months, while all these various matters were going on in Rockland, the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather had been busy with the records of ancient councils and the writings of the early fathers. The more he read, the more discontented he became with the platform upon which he and his people were standing. They and he were clearly in a minority, and his deep inward longing to be with the majority was growing into an engrossing passion. He yearned especially towards the good old unquestioning, authoritative Mother Church, with her articles of faith which took away the necessity for private judgment, with her traditional forms and ceremonies, and her whole apparatus of stimulants and anodynes.

About this time he procured a breviary and kept it in his desk under the loose papers. He sent to a Catholic bookstore and obtained a small crucifix suspended from a string of beads. He ordered his new coat to be cut very narrow in

the collar and to be made single-breasted. He began an informal series of religious conversations with Miss O'Brien, the young person of Irish extraction already referred to as Bridget, maid of all work. These not proving very satisfactory, he managed to fall in with Father McShane, the Catholic priest of the Rockland church. Father McShane encouraged his nibble very scientifically. It would be such a fine thing to bring over one of those Protestant heretics, and a "liberal" one too! — not that there was any real difference between them, but it sounded better to say that one of these rationalizing free-and-equal religionists had been made a convert than any of those half-way Protestants who were the slaves of catechisms instead of councils and of commentators instead of popes. The subtle priest played his disciple with his finest tackle. It was hardly necessary: when anything or anybody wishes to be caught, a bare hook and a coarse line are all that is needed.

If a man has a genuine, sincere, hearty wish to get rid of his liberty, if he is really bent upon becoming a slave, nothing can stop him. And the temptation is to some natures a very great one. Liberty is often a heavy burden on a man. It involves that necessity for perpetual choice which is the kind of labor men have always dreaded. In common life we shirk it by forming *habits*, which take the place of self-determination. In politics party-organization saves us the pains of much

thinking before deciding how to cast our vote. In religious matters there are great multitudes watching us perpetually, each propagandist ready with his bundle of finalities, which having accepted we may be at peace. The more absolute the submission demanded, the stronger the temptation becomes to those who have been long tossed among doubts and conflicts.

So it is that in all the quiet bays which indent the shores of the great ocean of thought, at every sinking wharf, we see moored the hulks and the razees of enslaved or half-enslaved intelligences. They rock peacefully as children in their cradles on the subdued swell which comes feebly in over the bar at the harbor's mouth, slowly crusting with barnacles, pulling at their iron cables as if they really wanted to be free, but better contented to remain bound as they are. For these no more the round unwalled horizon of the open sea, the joyous breeze aloft, the furrow, the foam, the sparkle that track the rushing keel! They have escaped the dangers of the wave, and lie still henceforth, evermore. Happiest of souls, if lethargy is bliss, and palsy the chief beatitude!

America owes its political freedom to religious Protestantism. But political freedom is reacting on religious prescription with still mightier force. We wonder, therefore, when we find a soul which was born to a full sense of individual liberty, an unchallenged right of self-determination on every new alleged truth offered to its

intelligence, voluntarily surrendering any portion of its liberty to a spiritual dictatorship which always proves to rest, in the last analysis, on *a majority vote*, nothing more nor less, commonly an old one, passed in those barbarous times when men cursed and murdered each other for differences of opinion, and of course were not in a condition to settle the beliefs of a comparatively civilized community.

In our disgust, we are liable to be intolerant. We forget that weakness is not in itself a sin. We forget that even cowardice may call for our most lenient judgment, if it spring from innate infirmity. Who of us does not look with great tenderness on the young chieftain in the "Fair Maid of Perth," when he confesses his want of courage? All of us love companionship and sympathy; some of us may love them too much. All of us are more or less imaginative in our theology. Some of us may find the aid of material symbols a comfort, if not a necessity. The boldest thinker may have his moments of languor and discouragement, when he feels as if he could willingly exchange faiths with the old beldame crossing herself at the cathedral-door, — nay, that, if he could drop all coherent thought, and lie in the flowery meadow with the brown-eyed solemnly unthinking cattle, looking up to the sky, and all their simple consciousness staining itself blue, then down to the grass, and life turning to a mere greenness, blended with con-

fused scents of herbs,—no individual mind-movement such as men are teased with, but the great calm cattle-sense of all time and all places that know the milky smell of herds, — if he could be like these, he would be content to be driven home by the cow-boy, and share the grassy banquet of the king of ancient Babylon. Let us be very generous, then, in our judgment of those who leave the front ranks of thought for the company of the meek non-combatants who follow with the baggage and provisions. Age, illness, too much wear and tear, a half-formed paralysis, may bring any of us to this pass. But while we can think and maintain the rights of our own individuality against every human combination, let us not forget to caution all who are disposed to waver that there is a cowardice which is criminal, and a longing for rest which it is baseness to indulge. God help him, over whose dead soul in his living body must be uttered the sad supplication, *Requiescat in pace!*

A knock at the Reverend Mr. Fairweather's study-door called his eyes from the book on which they were intent. He looked up, as if expecting a welcome guest.

The Reverend Pierrepont Honeywood, D. D., entered the study of the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather. He was not the expected guest. Mr. Fairweather slipped the book he was reading into a half-open drawer, and pushed in the drawer.

He slid something which rattled under a paper lying on the table. He rose with a slight change of color, and welcomed, a little awkwardly, his unusual visitor.

"Good evening, Brother Fairweather!" said the Reverend Doctor, in a very cordial, good-humored way. "I hope I am not spoiling one of those eloquent sermons I never have a chance to hear."

"Not at all, not at all," the younger clergyman answered, in a languid tone, with a kind of habitual half-querulousness which belonged to it, — the vocal expression which we meet with now and then, and which says as plainly as so many words could say it, "I am a suffering individual. I am persistently undervalued, wronged, and imposed upon by mankind and the powers of the universe generally. But I endure all. I endure *you*. Speak. I listen. It is a burden to me, but I even approve. I sacrifice myself. Behold this movement of my lips! It is a smile."

The Reverend Doctor knew this forlorn way of Mr. Fairweather's, and was not troubled by it. He proceeded to relate the circumstances of his visit from the old black woman, and the fear she was in about the young girl, who being a parishioner of Mr. Fairweather's, he had thought it best to come over and speak to him about old Sophy's fears and fancies.

In telling the old woman's story, he alluded only vaguely to those peculiar circumstances to

which she had attributed so much importance, taking it for granted that the other minister must be familiar with the whole series of incidents she had related. The old minister was mistaken, as we have before seen. Mr. Fairweather had been settled in the place only about ten years, and, if he had heard a strange hint now and then about Elsie, had never considered it as anything more than idle and ignorant, if not malicious, village-gossip. All that he fully understood was that this had been a perverse and unmanageable child, and that the extraordinary care which had been bestowed on her had been so far thrown away that she was a dangerous, self-willed girl, whom all feared and almost all shunned, as if she carried with her some malignant influence.

He replied, therefore, after hearing the story, that Elsie had always given trouble. There seemed to be a kind of natural obliquity about her. Perfectly unaccountable. A very dark case. Never amenable to good influences. Had sent her good books from the Sunday-school library. Remembered that she tore out the frontispiece of one of them, and kept it, and flung the book out of the window. It was a picture of Eve's temptation; and he recollected her saying that Eve was a good woman, — and she'd have done just so, if she'd been there. A very sad child, — very sad; bad from infancy. — He had talked himself bold, and said all at once, —

"Doctor, do you know I am almost ready to

accept your doctrine of the congenital sinfulness of human nature? I am afraid that is the only thing which goes to the bottom of the difficulty."

The old minister's face did not open so approvingly as Mr. Fairweather had expected.

"Why, yes, — well, — many find comfort in it, — I believe; — there is much to be said, — there are many bad people, — and bad children, — I can't be so sure about bad babies, — though they cry very malignantly at times, — especially if they have the stomach-ache. But I really don't know how to condemn this poor Elsie; she may have impulses that act in her like instincts in the lower animals, and so not come under the bearing of our ordinary rules of judgment."

"But this depraved tendency, Doctor, — this unaccountable perverseness. My dear Sir, I am afraid your school is in the right about human nature. Oh, those words of the Psalmist, 'shapen in iniquity,' and the rest! What are we to do with them, — we who teach that the soul of a child is an unstained white tablet?"

"King David was very subject to fits of humility, and much given to self-reproaches," said the Doctor, in a rather dry way. "We owe you and your friends a good deal for calling attention to the natural graces, which, after all, may, perhaps, be considered as another form of manifestation of the divine influence. Some of our writers have pressed rather too hard on the tendencies of the human soul toward evil as such. It may be ques-

tioned whether these views have not interfered with the sound training of certain young persons, sons of clergymen and others. I am nearer of your mind about the possibility of educating children so that they shall become good Christians without any violent transition. That is what I should hope for from bringing them up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.'"

The younger minister looked puzzled, but presently answered, —

"Possibly we may have called attention to some neglected truths; but, after all, I fear we must go to the old school, if we want to get at the root of the matter. I know there is an outward amiability about many young persons, some young girls especially, that seems like genuine goodness; but I have been disposed of late to lean toward your view, that these human affections, as we see them in our children, — ours, I say, though I have not the fearful responsibility of training any of my own, — are only a kind of disguised and sinful selfishness."

The old minister groaned in spirit. His heart had been softened by the sweet influences of children and grandchildren. He thought of a half-sized grave in the burial-ground, and the fine, brave, noble-hearted boy he laid in it thirty years before, — the sweet, cheerful child who had made his home all sunshine until the day when he was brought into it, his long curls dripping, his fresh lips purpled in death, — foolish dear little

blessed creature to throw himself into the deep water to save the drowning boy, who clung about him and carried him under! Disguised selfishness! And his granddaughter too, whose disguised selfishness was the light of his household!

"Don't call it my view!" he said. "Abstractly, perhaps, all natures may be considered vitiated; but practically, as I see it in life, the divine grace keeps pace with the perverted instincts from infancy in many natures. Besides, this perversion itself may often be disease, bad habits transmitted, like drunkenness, or some hereditary misfortune, as with this Elsie we were talking about."

The younger minister was completely mystified. At every step he made towards the Doctor's recognized theological position, the Doctor took just one step towards his. They would cross each other soon at this rate, and might as well exchange pulpits, — as Colonel Sprowle once wished they would, it may be remembered.

The Doctor, though a much clearer-headed man, was almost equally puzzled. He turned the conversation again upon Elsie, and endeavored to make her minister feel the importance of bringing every friendly influence to bear upon her at this critical period of her life. His sympathies did not seem so lively as the Doctor could have wished. Perhaps he had vastly more important objects of solicitude in his own spiritual interests.

A knock at the door interrupted them. The

Reverend Mr. Fairweather rose and went towards it. As he passed the table, his coat caught something, which came rattling to the floor. It was a crucifix with a string of beads attached. As he opened the door, the Milesian features of Father McShane presented themselves, and from their centre proceeded the clerical benediction in Irish-sounding Latin, *Pax vobiscum!*

The Reverend Doctor Honeywood rose and left the priest and his disciple together.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SPIDER ON HIS THREAD.

There was nobody, then, to counsel poor Elsie, except her father, who had learned to let her have her own way so as not to disturb such relations as they had together, and the old black woman, who had a real, though limited influence over the girl. Perhaps she did not need counsel. To look upon her, one might well suppose that she was competent to defend herself against any enemy she was like to have. That glittering, piercing eye was not to be softened by a few smooth words spoken in low tones, charged with the common sentiments which win their way to maidens' hearts. That round, lithe, sinuous figure was as full of dangerous life as ever lay under the slender flanks and clean-shaped limbs of a panther.

There were particular times when Elsie was in such a mood that it must have been a bold person who would have intruded upon her with reproof or counsel. "This is one of her days," old Sophy would say quietly to her father, and he would, as far as possible, leave her to herself.

These days were more frequent, as old Sophy's keen, concentrated watchfulness had taught her, at certain periods of the year. It was in the heats of summer that they were most common and most strongly characterized. In winter, on the other hand, she was less excitable, and even at times heavy and as if chilled and dulled in her sensibilities. It was a strange, paroxysmal kind of life that belonged to her. It seemed to come and go with the sunlight. All winter long she would be comparatively quiet, easy to manage, listless, slow in her motions; her eye would lose something of its strange lustre; and the old nurse would feel so little anxiety, that her whole expression and aspect would show the change, and people would say to her, "Why, Sophy, how young you're looking!"

As the spring came on, Elsie would leave the fireside, have her tiger-skin spread in the empty southern chamber next the wall, and lie there basking for whole hours in the sunshine. As the season warmed, the light would kindle afresh in her eyes, and the old woman's sleep would grow restless again, — for she knew, that, so long as the glitter was fierce in the girl's eyes, there was no trusting her impulses or movements.

At last, when the veins of the summer were hot and swollen, and the juices of all the poison-plants and the blood of all the creatures that feed upon them had grown thick and strong, — about the time when the second mowing was in hand, and

the brown, wet-faced men were following up the scythes as they chased the falling waves of grass, (falling as the waves fall on sickle-curved beaches; the foam-flowers dropping as the grass-flowers drop, — with sharp semivowel consonantal sounds, — *frsh*, — for that is the way the sea talks, and leaves all pure vowel-sounds for the winds to breathe over it, and all mutes to the unyielding earth,) — about this time of over-ripe midsummer, the life of Elsie seemed fullest of its malign and restless instincts. This was the period of the year when the Rockland people were most cautious of wandering in the leafier coverts which skirted the base of The Mountain, and the farmers liked to wear thick, long boots, whenever they went into the bushes. But Elsie was never so much given to roaming over The Mountain as at this season; and as she had grown more absolute and uncontrollable, she was as like to take the night as the day for her rambles.

At this season, too, all her peculiar tastes in dress and ornament came out in a more striking way than at other times. She was never so superb as then, and never so threatening in her scowling beauty. The barred skirts she always fancied showed sharply beneath her diaphanous muslins; the diamonds often glittered on her breast as if for her own pleasure rather than to dazzle others; the asp-like bracelet hardly left her arm. She was never seen without some necklace, — either the golden cord she wore at the

great party, or a chain of mosaics, or simply a ring of golden scales. Some said that Elsie always slept in a necklace, and that when she died she was to be buried in one. It was a fancy of hers, — but many thought there was a reason for it.

Nobody watched Elsie with a more searching eye than her cousin, Dick Venner. He had kept more out of her way of late, it is true, but there was not a movement she made which he did not carefully observe just so far as he could without exciting her suspicion. It was plain enough to him that the road to fortune was before him, and that the first thing was to marry Elsie. What course he should take with her, or with others interested, after marrying her, need not be decided in a hurry.

He had now done all he could expect to do at present in the way of conciliating the other members of the household. The girl's father tolerated him, if he did not even like him. Whether he suspected his project or not Dick did not feel sure; but it was something to have got a foothold in the house, and to have overcome any prepossession against him which his uncle might have entertained. To be a good listener and a bad billiard-player was not a very great sacrifice to effect this object. Then old Sophy could hardly help feeling well-disposed towards him, after the gifts he had bestowed on her and the court he had payed her. These were the only persons

on the place of much importance to gain over. The people employed about the house and farmlands had little to do with Elsie, except to obey her without questioning her commands.

Mr. Richard began to think of reopening his second parallel. But he had lost something of the coolness with which he had begun his system of operations. The more he had reflected upon the matter, the more he had convinced himself that this was his one great chance in life. If he suffered this girl to escape him, such an opportunity could hardly, in the nature of things, present itself a second time. Only one life between Elsie and her fortune, — and lives are so uncertain! The girl might not suit him as a wife. Possibly. Time enough to find out after he had got her. In short, he must have the property, and Elsie Venner, as she was to go with it, — and then, if he found it convenient and agreeable to lead a virtuous life, he would settle down and raise children and vegetables; but if he found it inconvenient and disagreeable, so much the worse for those who made it so. Like many other persons, he was not principled against virtue, provided virtue were a better investment than its opposite; but he knew that there might be contingencies in which the property would be better without its incumbrances, and he contemplated this conceivable problem in the light of all its possible solutions.

One thing Mr. Richard could not conceal from himself: Elsie had some new cause of indiffer-

ence, at least, if not of aversion to him. With the acuteness which persons who make a sole business of their own interest gain by practice, so that fortune-hunters are often shrewd where real lovers are terribly simple, he fixed at once on the young man up at the school where the girl had been going of late, as probably at the bottom of it.

"Cousin Elsie in love!" so he communed with himself upon his lonely pillow. "In love with a Yankee school-master! What else can it be? Let him look out for himself! He'll stand but a bad chance between us. What makes you think she's in love with him? Met her walking with him. Don't like her looks and ways;—she's thinking about *something*, anyhow. Where does she get those books she is reading so often? Not out of our library, that's certain. If I could have ten minutes' peep into her chamber now, I would find out where she got them, and what mischief she was up to."

At that instant, as if some tributary demon had heard his wish, a shape which could be none but Elsie's flitted through a gleam of moonlight into the shadow of the trees. She was setting out on one of her midnight rambles.

Dick felt his heart stir in its place, and presently his cheeks flushed with the old longing for an adventure. It was not much to invade a young girl's deserted chamber, but it would amuse a wakeful hour, and tell him some little matters he

wanted to know. The chamber he slept in was over the room which Elsie chiefly occupied at this season. There was no great risk of his being seen or heard, if he ventured down-stairs to her apartment.

Mr. Richard Venner, in the pursuit of his interesting project, arose and lighted a lamp. He wrapped himself in a dressing-gown and thrust his feet into a pair of cloth slippers. He stole carefully down the stair, and arrived safely at the door of Elsie's room. The young lady had taken the natural precaution to leave it fastened, carrying the key with her, no doubt, — unless, indeed, she had got out by the window, which was not far from the ground. Dick could get in at this window easily enough, but he did not like the idea of leaving his footprints in the flower-bed just under it. He returned to his own chamber, and held a council of war with himself.

He put his head out of his own window and looked at that beneath. It was open. He then went to one of his trunks, which he unlocked, and began carefully removing its contents. What these were we need not stop to mention, — only remarking that there were dresses of various patterns, which might afford an agreeable series of changes, and in certain contingencies prove eminently useful. After removing a few of these, he thrust his hand to the very bottom of the remaining pile and drew out a coiled strip of leather many yards in length, ending in a noose, — a

tough, well-seasoned *lasso*, looking as if it had seen service and was none the worse for it. He uncoiled a few yards of this and fastened it to the knob of a door. Then he threw the loose end out of the window so that it should hang by the open casement of Elsie's room. By this he let himself down opposite her window, and with a slight effort swung himself inside the room. He lighted a match, found a candle, and, having lighted that, looked curiously about him, as Clodius might have done when he smuggled himself in among the Vestals.

Elsie's room was almost as peculiar as her dress and ornaments. It was a kind of museum of objects, such as the woods are full of to those who have eyes to see them, but many of them such as only few could hope to reach, even if they knew where to look for them. Crows' nests, which are never found but in the tall trees, commonly enough in the forks of ancient hemlocks, eggs of rare birds, which must have taken a quick eye and a hard climb to find and get hold of, mosses and ferns of unusual aspect, and quaint monstrosities of vegetable growth, such as Nature delights in, showed that Elsie had her tastes and fancies like any naturalist or poet.

Nature, when left to her own freaks in the forest, is grotesque and fanciful to the verge of license, and beyond it. The foliage of trees does not always require clipping to make it look like an image of life. From those windows at Canoe

Meadow, among the mountains, we could see all summer long a lion rampant, a Shanghai chicken, and General Jackson on horseback, done by Nature in green leaves, each with a single tree. But to Nature's tricks with boughs and roots and smaller vegetable growths there is no end. Her fancy is infinite, and her humor not always refined. There is a perpetual reminiscence of animal life in her rude caricatures, which sometimes actually reach the point of imitating the complete human figure, as in that extraordinary specimen which nobody will believe to be genuine, except the men of science, and of which the discreet reader may have a glimpse by application in the proper quarter.

Elsie had gathered so many of these sculpture-like monstrosities, that one might have thought she had robbed old Sophy's grandfather of his fetishes. They helped to give her room a kind of enchanted look, as if a witch had her home in it. Over the fireplace was a long, staff-like branch, strangled in the spiral coils of one of those vines which strain the smaller trees in their clinging embraces, sinking into the bark until the parasite becomes almost identified with its support. With these sylvan curiosities were blended objects of art, some of them not less singular, but others showing a love for the beautiful in form and color, such as a girl of fine organization and nice culture might naturally be expected to feel and to indulge, in adorning her apartment.

All these objects, pictures, bronzes, vases, and the rest, did not detain Mr. Richard Venner very long, whatever may have been his sensibilities to art. He was more curious about books and papers. A copy of Keats lay on the table. He opened it and read the name of *Bernard C. Langdon* on the blank leaf. An envelope was on the table with Elsie's name written in a similar hand; but the envelope was empty, and he could not find the note it contained. Her desk was locked, and it would not be safe to tamper with it. He had seen enough; the girl received books and notes from this fellow up at the school, — this usher, this Yankee quill-driver; — *he* was aspiring to become the lord of the Dudley domain, then, was he?

Elsie had been reasonably careful. She had locked up her papers, whatever they might be. There was little else that promised to reward his curiosity, but he cast his eye on everything. There was a clasp-Bible among her books. Dick wondered if she ever unclasped it. There was a book of hymns; it had her name in it, and looked as if it might have been often read; — what the *diablo* had Elsie to do with hymns?

Mr. Richard Venner was in an observing and analytical state of mind, it will be noticed, or he might perhaps have been touched with the innocent betrayals of the poor girl's chamber. Had she, after all, some human tenderness in her heart? That was not the way he put the ques-

tion, — but whether she would take seriously to this schoolmaster, and if she did, what would be the neatest and surest and quickest way of putting a stop to all that nonsense. All this, however, he could think over more safely in his own quarters. So he stole softly to the window, and, catching the end of the leathern thong, regained his own chamber and drew in the lasso.

It needs only a little jealousy to set a man on who is doubtful in love or wooing, or to make him take hold of his courting in earnest. As soon as Dick had satisfied himself that the young schoolmaster was his rival in Elsie's good graces, his whole thoughts concentrated themselves more than ever on accomplishing his great design of securing her for himself. There was no time to be lost. He must come into closer relations with her, so as to withdraw her thoughts from this fellow, and to find out more exactly what was the state of her affections, if she had any. So he began to court her company again, to propose riding with her, to sing to her, to join her whenever she was strolling about the grounds, to make himself agreeable, according to the ordinary understanding of that phrase, in every way which seemed to promise a chance for succeeding in that amiable effort.

The girl treated him more capriciously than ever. She would be sullen and silent, or she would draw back fiercely at some harmless word or gesture, or she would look at him with her

eyes narrowed in such a strange way and with such a wicked light in them that Dick swore to himself they were too much for him, and would leave her for the moment. Yet she tolerated him, almost as a matter of necessity, and sometimes seemed to take a kind of pleasure in trying her power upon him. This he soon found out, and humored her in the fancy that she could exercise a kind of fascination over him, — though there were times in which he actually felt an influence he could not understand, an effect of some peculiar expression about her, perhaps, but still centring in those diamond eyes of hers which it made one feel so curiously to look into.

Whether Elsie saw into his object or not was more than he could tell. His idea was, after having conciliated the good-will of all about her as far as possible, to make himself first a habit and then a necessity with the girl, — not to spring any trap of a declaration upon her until tolerance had grown into such a degree of inclination as her nature was like to admit. He had succeeded in the first part of his plan. He was at liberty to prolong his visit at his own pleasure. This was not strange; these three persons, Dudley Venner, his daughter, and his nephew, represented all that remained of an old and honorable family. Had Elsie been like other girls, her father might have been less willing to entertain a young fellow like Dick as an inmate; but he had long outgrown all the slighter apprehensions which he might have

had in common with all parents, and followed rather than led the imperious instincts of his daughter. It was not a question of sentiment, but of life and death, or more than that, — some dark ending, perhaps, which would close the history of his race with disaster and evil report upon the lips of all coming generations.

As to the thought of his nephew's making love to his daughter, it had almost passed from his mind. He had been so long in the habit of looking at Elsie as outside of all common influences and exceptional in the law of her nature, that it was difficult for him to think of her as a girl to be fallen in love with. Many persons are surprised, when others court their female relatives; they know them as good young or old women enough, — aunts, sisters, nieces, daughters, whatever they may be, — but never think of anybody's falling in love with them, any more than of their being struck by lightning. But in this case there were special reasons, in addition to the common family delusion, — reasons which seemed to make it impossible that she should attract a suitor. Who would *dare* to marry Elsie? No, let her have the pleasure, if it was one, at any rate the wholesome excitement, of companionship; it might save her from lapsing into melancholy or a worse form of madness. Dudley Venner had a kind of superstition, too, that, if Elsie could only outlive three septenaries, twenty-one years, so that, according to the prevalent idea, her whole

frame would have been thrice made over, counting from her birth, she would revert to the natural standard of health of mind and feelings from which she had been so long perverted. The thought of any other motive than love being sufficient to induce Richard to become her suitor had not occurred to him. He had married early, at that happy period when interested motives are least apt to influence the choice; and his single idea of marriage was, that it was the union of persons naturally drawn towards each other by some mutual attraction. Very simple, perhaps; but he had lived lonely for many years since his wife's death, and judged the hearts of others, most of all of his brother's son, by his own. He had often thought whether, in case of Elsie's dying or being necessarily doomed to seclusion, he might not adopt this nephew and make him his heir; but it had not occurred to him that Richard might wish to become his son-in-law for the sake of his property.

It is very easy to criticise other people's modes of dealing with their children. Outside observers see results; parents see processes. They notice the trivial movements and accents which betray the blood of this or that ancestor; they can detect the irrepressible movement of hereditary impulse in looks and acts which mean nothing to the common observer. To be a parent is almost to be a fatalist. This boy sits with legs crossed, just as his uncle used to whom he never saw;

his grandfathers both died before he was born, but he has the movement of the eyebrows which we remember in one of them, and the gusty temper of the other.

These are things parents can see, and which they must take account of in education, but which few except parents can be expected to really understand. Here and there a sagacious person, old, or of middle age, who has *triangulated* a race, that is, taken three or more observations from the several standing-places of three different generations, can tell pretty nearly the range of possibilities and the limitations of a child, actual or potential, of a given stock, — errors excepted always, because children of the same stock are not bred just alike, because the traits of some less known ancestor are liable to break out at any time, and because each human being has, after all, a small fraction of individuality about him which gives him a flavor, so that he is distinguishable from others by his friends or in a court of justice, and which occasionally makes a genius or a saint or a criminal of him. It is well that young persons cannot read these fatal oracles of Nature. Blind impulse is her highest wisdom, after all. We make our great jump, and then she takes the bandage off our eyes. That is the way the broad sea-level of average is maintained, and the physiological democracy is enabled to fight against the principle of selection which would disinherit all the

weaker children. The magnificent constituency of mediocrities of which the world is made up, — the people without biographies, whose lives have made a clear solution in the fluid menstruum of time, instead of being precipitated in the opaque sediment of history ——

But this is a narrative, and not a disquisition.

CHAPTER XX.

FROM WITHOUT AND FROM WITHIN.

There were not wanting people who accused Dudley Venner of weakness and bad judgment in his treatment of his daughter. Some were of opinion that the great mistake was in not "breaking her will" when she was a little child. There was nothing the matter with her, they said, but that she had been spoiled by indulgence. If *they* had had the charge of her, they'd have brought her down. She'd got the upperhand of her father now; but if he'd only taken hold of her in season! There are people who think that everything may be done, if the doer, be he educator or physician, be only called "in season." No doubt, — but *in season* would often be a hundred or two years before the child was born; and people never send so early as that.

The father of Elsie Venner knew his duties and his difficulties too well to trouble himself about anything others might think or say. So soon as he found that he could not govern his child, he gave his life up to following her and protecting her as far as he could. It was a stern

and terrible trial for a man of acute sensibility, and not without force of intellect and will, and the manly ambition for himself and his family-name which belonged to his endowments and his position. Passive endurance is the hardest trial to persons of such a nature.

What made it still more a long martyrdom was the necessity for bearing his cross in utter loneliness. He could not tell his griefs. He could not talk of them even with those who knew their secret spring. His minister had the unsympathetic nature which is common in the meaner sort of devotees, — persons who mistake spiritual selfishness for sanctity, and grab at the infinite prize of the great Future and Elsewhere with the egotism they excommunicate in its hardly more odious forms of avarice and self-indulgence. How could he speak with the old physician and the old black woman about a sorrow and a terror which but to name was to strike dumb the lips of Consolation?

In the dawn of his manhood he had found that second consciousness for which young men and young women go about looking into each other's faces, with their sweet, artless aim playing in every feature, and making them beautiful to each other, as to all of us. He had found his other self early, before he had grown weary in the search and wasted his freshness in vain longings: the lot of many, perhaps we may say of most, who infringe the patent of our social order by in-

truding themselves into a life already upon half-allowance of the necessary luxuries of existence. The life he had led for a brief space was not only beautiful in outward circumstance, as old Sophy had described it to the Reverend Doctor. It was that delicious process of the tuning of two souls to each other, string by string, not without little half-pleasing discords now and then when some chord in one or the other proves to be over-strained or over-lax, but always approaching nearer and nearer to harmony, until they become at last as two instruments with a single voice. Something more than a year of this blissful doubled consciousness had passed over him when he found himself once more alone, — alone, save for the little diamond-eyed child lying in the old black woman's arms, with the coral necklace round her throat and the rattle in her hand.

He would not die by his own act. It was not the way in his family. There may have been other, perhaps better reasons, but this was enough; he did not come of suicidal stock. He must live for this child's sake, at any rate; and yet, — oh, yet, who could tell with what thoughts he looked upon her? Sometimes her little features would look placid, and something like a smile would steal over them; then all his tender feelings would rush up into his eyes, and he would put his arms out to take her from the old woman, — but all at once her eyes would narrow and she would throw her head back;

and a shudder would seize him as he stooped over his child, — he could not look upon her, — he could not touch his lips to her cheek; nay, there would sometimes come into his soul such frightful suggestions that he would hurry from the room lest the hinted thought should become a momentary madness and he should lift his hand against the hapless infant which owed him life.

In those miserable days he used to wander all over The Mountain in his restless endeavor to seek some relief for inward suffering in outward action. He had no thought of throwing himself from the summit of any of the broken cliffs, but he clambered over them recklessly, as having no particular care for his life. Sometimes he would go into the accursed district where the venomous reptiles were always to be dreaded, and court their worst haunts, and kill all he could come near with a kind of blind fury which was strange in a person of his gentle nature.

One overhanging cliff was a favorite haunt of his. It frowned upon his home beneath in a very menacing way; he noticed slight seams and fissures that looked ominous; — what would happen, if it broke off some time or other and came crashing down on the fields and roofs below? He thought of such a possible catastrophe with a singular indifference, in fact with a feeling almost like pleasure. It would be such a swift and thorough solution of this great prob-

lem of life he was working out in ever-recurring daily anguish! The remote possibility of such a catastrophe had frightened some timid dwellers beneath The Mountain to other places of residence; here the danger was most imminent, and yet he loved to dwell upon the chances of its occurrence. Danger is often the best *counter-irritant* in cases of mental suffering; he found a solace in careless exposure of his life, and learned to endure the trials of each day better by dwelling in imagination on the possibility that it might be the last for him and the home that was his.

Time, the great consoler, helped these influences, and he gradually fell into more easy and less dangerous habits of life. He ceased from his more perilous rambles. He thought less of the danger from the great overhanging rocks and forests; they had hung there for centuries; it was not very likely they would crash or slide in his time. He became accustomed to all Elsie's strange looks and ways. Old Sophy dressed her with ruffles round her neck, and hunted up the red coral branch with silver bells which the little toothless Dudleys had bitten upon for a hundred years. By an infinite effort, her father forced himself to become the companion of this child, for whom he had such a mingled feeling, but whose presence was always a trial to him and often a terror.

At a cost which no human being could esti-

mate, he had done his duty, and in some degree reaped his reward. Elsie grew up with a kind of filial feeling for him, such as her nature was capable of. She never would obey him; that was not to be looked for. Commands, threats, punishments, were out of the question with her; the mere physical effects of crossing her will betrayed themselves in such changes of expression and manner that it would have been senseless to attempt to govern her in any such way. Leaving her mainly to herself, she could be to some extent indirectly influenced, — not otherwise. She called her father "Dudley," as if he had been her brother. She ordered everybody and would be ordered by none.

Who could know all these things, except the few people of the household? What wonder, therefore, that ignorant and shallow persons laid the blame on her father of those peculiarities which were freely talked about, — of those darker tendencies which were hinted of in whispers? To all this talk, so far as it reached him, he was supremely indifferent, not only with the indifference which all gentlemen feel to the gossip of their inferiors, but with a charitable calmness which did not wonder or blame. He knew that his position was not simply a difficult, but an impossible one, and schooled himself to bear his destiny as well as he might, and report himself only at Headquarters.

He had grown gentle under this discipline.

His hair was just beginning to be touched with silver, and his expression was that of habitual sadness and anxiety. He had no counsellor, as we have seen, to turn to, who did not know either too much or too little. He had no heart to rest upon and into which he might unburden himself of the secrets and the sorrows that were aching in his own breast. Yet he had not allowed himself to run to waste in the long time since he was left alone to his trials and fears. He had resisted the seductions which always beset solitary men with restless brains overwrought by depressing agencies. He disguised no misery to himself with the lying delusion of wine. He sought no sleep from narcotics, though he lay with throbbing, wide-open eyeballs through all the weary hours of the night.

It was understood between Dudley Venner and old Doctor Kittredge that Elsie was a subject of occasional medical observation, on account of certain mental peculiarities which might end in a permanent affection of her reason. Beyond this nothing was said, whatever may have been in the mind of either. But Dudley Venner had studied Elsie's case in the light of all the books he could find which might do anything towards explaining it. As in all cases where men meddle with medical science for a special purpose, having no previous acquaintance with it, his imagination found what it wanted in the books he read, and adjusted it to the facts before him. So it was he came to cherish those two fancies before alluded to: that

the ominous birth-mark she had carried from infancy might fade and become obliterated, and that the age of complete maturity might be signalized by an entire change in her physical and mental state. He held these vague hopes as all of us nurse our only half-believed illusions. Not for the world would he have questioned his sagacious old medical friend as to the probability or possibility of their being true. We are very shy of asking questions of those who know enough to destroy with one word the hopes we live on.

In this life of comparative seclusion to which the father had doomed himself for the sake of his child, he had found time for large and varied reading. The learned Judge Thornton confessed himself surprised at the extent of Dudley Venner's information. Doctor Kittredge found that he was in advance of him in the knowledge of recent physiological discoveries. He had taken pains to become acquainted with agricultural chemistry; and the neighboring farmers owed him some useful hints about the management of their land. He renewed his old acquaintance with the classic authors. He loved to warm his pulses with Homer and calm them down with Horace. He received all manner of new books and periodicals, and gradually gained an interest in the events of the passing time. Yet he remained almost a hermit, not absolutely refusing to see his neighbors, nor ever churlish towards them, but on the other hand not cultivating any intimate relations with them.

He had retired from the world a young man, little more than a youth, indeed, with sentiments and aspirations all of them suddenly extinguished. The first had bequeathed him a single huge sorrow, the second a single trying duty. In due time the anguish had lost something of its poignancy, the light of earlier and happier memories had begun to struggle with and to soften its thick darkness, and even that duty which he had confronted with such an effort had become an endurable habit.

At a period of life when many have been living on the capital of their acquired knowledge and their youthful stock of sensibilities until their intellects are really shallower and their hearts emptier than they were at twenty, Dudley Venner was stronger in thought and tenderer in soul than in the first freshness of his youth, when he counted but half his present years. He had entered that period which marks the decline of men who have ceased growing in knowledge and strength: from forty to fifty a man must move upward, or the natural falling off in the vigor of life will carry him rapidly downward. At this time his inward nature was richer and deeper than in any earlier period of his life. If he could only be summoned to action, he was capable of noble service. If his sympathies could only find an outlet, he was never so capable of love as now; for his natural affections had been gathering in the course of all these years, and the traces

of that ineffaceable calamity of his life were softened and partially hidden by new growths of thought and feeling, as the wreck left by a mountain-slide is covered over by the gentle intrusion of the soft-stemmed herbs which will prepare it for the stronger vegetation that will bring it once more into harmony with the peaceful slopes around it.

Perhaps Dudley Venner had not gained so much in worldly wisdom as if he had been more in society and less in his study. The indulgence with which he treated his nephew was, no doubt, imprudent. A man more in the habit of dealing with men would have been more guarded with a person with Dick's questionable story and unquestionable physiognomy. But he was singularly unsuspicious, and his natural kindness was an additional motive to the wish for introducing some variety into the routine of Elsie's life.

If Dudley Venner did not know just what he wanted at this period of his life, there were a great many people in the town of Rockland who thought they did know. He had been a widower long enough, — nigh twenty year, wa'n't it? He'd been aout to Spraowles's party, — there wa'n't anything to hender him why he shouldn't stir raound l'k other folks. What was the reason he didn't go abaout to taown-meetin's 'n' Sahbath-meetin's, 'n' lýceums, 'n' school-'xaminations, 'n' s'prise-parties, 'n' funerals, — and other entertainments where the still-faced two-story folks were in

the habit of looking round to see if any of the mansion-house gentry were present? — Fac' was, he was livin' too lonesome daown there at the mansion-haouse. Why shouldn't he make up to the Jedge's daughter? She was genteel enough for him and — let's see, haow old was she? Seven-'n'-twenty, — no, six-'n'-twenty, — born the same year we buried aour little Anny Marí'.

There was no possible objection to this arrangement, if the parties interested had seen fit to make it or even to think of it. But "Portia," as some of the mansion-house people called her, did not happen to awaken the elective affinities of the lonely widower. He met her once in a while, and said to himself that she was a good specimen of the grand style of woman; and then the image came back to him of a woman not quite so large, not quite so imperial in her port, not quite so incisive in her speech, not quite so judicial in her opinions, but with two or three more joints in her frame, and two or three soft inflections in her voice, which for some absurd reason or other drew him to her side and so bewitched him that he told her half his secrets and looked into her eyes all that he could not tell, in less time than it would have taken him to discuss the champion paper of the last Quarterly with the admirable "Portia." *Heu, quanto minus!* How much more was that lost image to him than all it left on earth!

The study of love is very much like that of meteorology. We know that just about so much

rain will fall in a season; but on what particular day it will shower is more than we can tell. We know that just about so much love will be made every year in a given population; but who will rain his young affections upon the heart of whom is not known except to the astrologers and fortune-tellers. And why rain falls as it does, and why love is made just as it is, are equally puzzling questions.

The woman a man loves is always his own daughter, far more his daughter than the female children born to him by the common law of life. It is not the outside woman, who takes his name, that he loves: before her image has reached the centre of his consciousness, it has passed through fifty many-layered nerve-strainers, been churned over by ten thousand pulse-beats, and reacted upon by millions of lateral impulses which bandy it about through the mental spaces as a reflection is sent back and forward in a saloon lined with mirrors. With this altered image of the woman before him, his preëxisting ideal becomes blended. The object of his love is in part the offspring of her legal parents, but more of her lover's brain. The difference between the real and the ideal objects of love must not exceed a fixed maximum. The heart's vision cannot unite them stereoscopically into a single image, if the divergence passes certain limits. A formidable analogy, much in the nature of a proof, with very serious consequences, which moralists and match-makers

would do well to remember! Double vision with the eyes of the heart is a dangerous physiological state, and may lead to missteps and serious falls.

Whether Dudley Venner would ever find a breathing image near enough to his ideal one, to fill the desolate chamber of his heart, or not, was very doubtful. Some gracious and gentle woman, whose influence would steal upon him as the first low words of prayer after that interval of silent mental supplication known to one of our simpler forms of public worship, gliding into his consciousness without hurting its old griefs, herself knowing the chastening of sorrow, and subdued into sweet acquiescence with the Divine will, — some such woman as this, if Heaven should send him such, might call him back to the world of happiness, from which he seemed forever exiled. He could never again be the young lover who walked through the garden-alleys all red with roses in the old dead and buried June of long ago. He could never forget the bride of his youth, whose image, growing phantom-like with the lapse of years, hovered over him like a dream while waking and like a reality in dreams. But if it might be in God's good providence that this desolate life should come under the influence of human affections once more, what an ecstasy of renewed existence was in store for him! His life had not all been buried under that narrow ridge of turf with the white stone at its head. It

seemed so for a while; but it was not and could not and ought not to be so. His first passion had been a true and pure one; there was no spot or stain upon it. With all his grief there blended no cruel recollection of any word or look he would have wished to forget. All those little differences, such as young married people with any individual flavor in their characters must have, if they are tolerably mated, had only added to the music of existence, as the lesser discords admitted into some perfect symphony, fitly resolved, add richness and strength to the whole harmonious movement. It was a deep wound that Fate had inflicted on him; nay, it seemed like a mortal one; but the weapon was clean, and its edge was smooth. Such wounds must heal with time in healthy natures, whatever a false sentiment may say, by the wise and beneficent law of our being. The recollection of a deep and true affection is rather a divine nourishment for a life to grow strong upon than a poison to destroy it.

Dudley Venner's habitual sadness could not be laid wholly to his early bereavement. It was partly the result of the long struggle between natural affection and duty, on one side, and the involuntary tendencies these had to overcome, on the other, — between hope and fear, so long in conflict that despair itself would have been like an anodyne, and he would have slept upon some final catastrophe with the heavy sleep of a bankrupt after his failure is proclaimed. Alas! some

new affection might perhaps rekindle the fires of youth in his heart; but what power could calm that haggard terror of the parent which rose with every morning's sun and watched with every evening star, — what power save alone that of him who comes bearing the inverted torch, and leaving after him only the ashes printed with his footsteps?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WIDOW ROWENS GIVES A TEA-PARTY.

There was a good deal of interest felt, as has been said, in the lonely condition of Dudley Venner in that fine mansion-house of his, and with that strange daughter, who would never be married, as many people thought, in spite of all the stories. The feelings expressed by the good folks who dated from the time when they "buried aour little Anny Marí'," and others of that homespun stripe, were founded in reason, after all. And so it was natural enough that they should be shared by various ladies, who, having conjugated the verb *to live* as far as the preterpluperfect tense, were ready to change one of its vowels and begin with it in the present indicative. Unfortunately, there was very little chance of showing sympathy in its active form for a gentleman who kept himself so much out of the way as the master of the Dudley Mansion.

Various attempts had been made, from time to time, of late years, to get him out of his study, which had, for the most part, proved failures. It was a surprise, therefore, when he was seen at

the Great Party at the Colonel's. But it was an encouragement to try him again, and the consequence had been that he had received a number of notes inviting him to various smaller entertainments, which, as neither he nor Elsie had any fancy for them, he had politely declined.

Such was the state of things when he received an invitation to take tea *sociably*, with *a few friends*, at Hyacinth Cottage, the residence of the Widow Rowens, relict of the late Beeri Rowens, Esquire, better known as Major Rowens. Major Rowens was at the time of his decease a promising officer in the militia, in the direct line of promotion, as his waistband was getting tighter every year; and, as all the world knows, the militia-officer who splits off most buttons and fills the largest sword-belt stands the best chance of rising, or, perhaps we might say, spreading, to be General.

Major Rowens united in his person certain other traits which help a man to eminence in the branch of public service referred to. He ran to high colors, to wide whiskers, to open pores; he had the saddle-leather skin common in Englishmen, rarer in Americans, — never found in the Brahmin caste, oftener in the military and the commodores: observing people know what is meant; blow the seed-arrows from the white-kid-looking button which holds them on a dandelion-stalk, and the pricked-pincushion surface shows you what to look for. He had the loud,

gruff voice which implies the right to command. He had the thick hand, stubbed fingers, with bristled pads between their joints, square, broad thumb-nails, and sturdy limbs, which mark a constitution made to use in rough out-door work. He had the never-failing predilection for showy switch-tailed horses that step high, and sidle about, and act as if they were going to do something fearful the next minute, in the face of awed and admiring multitudes gathered at mighty musters or imposing cattle-shows. He had no objection, either, to holding the reins in a wagon behind another kind of horse, — a slouching, listless beast, with a strong slant to his shoulder and a notable depth to his quarter and an emphatic angle at the hock, who commonly walked or lounged along in a lazy trot of five or six miles an hour; but, if a lively colt happened to come rattling up alongside, or a brandy-faced old horse-jockey took the road to show off a fast nag, and threw his dust into the Major's face, would pick his legs up all at once, and straighten his body out, and swing off into a three-minute gait, in a way that "Old Blue" himself need not have been ashamed of.

For some reason which must be left to the next generation of professors to find out, the men who are knowing in horse-flesh have an eye also for, —— let a long dash separate the brute creation from the angelic being now to be named, —

for lovely woman. Of this fact there can be no possible doubt; and therefore you shall notice, that, if a fast horse trots before two, one of the twain is apt to be a pretty bit of mulieb-rity, with shapes to her, and eyes flying about in all directions.

Major Rowens, at that time Lieutenant of the Rockland Fusileers, had driven and "traded" horses not a few before he turned his acquired skill as a judge of physical advantages in another direction. He knew a neat, snug hoof, a delicate pastern, a broad haunch, a deep chest, a close ribbed-up barrel, as well as any other man in the town. He was not to be taken in by your thick-jointed, heavy-headed cattle, without any go to them, that suit a country-parson, nor yet by the "gaänted-up," long-legged animals, with all their constitutions bred out of them, such as rich greenhorns buy and cover up with their plated trappings.

Whether his equine experience was of any use to him in the selection of the mate with whom he was to go in double harness so long as they both should live, we need not stop to question. At any rate, nobody could find fault with the points of Miss Marilla Van Deusen, to whom he offered the privilege of becoming Mrs. Rowens. The *Van* must have been crossed out of her blood, for she was an out-and-out brunette, with hair and eyes black enough for a Mohawk's daughter. A fine style of woman, with

very striking tints and outlines, — an excellent match for the Lieutenant, except for one thing. She was marked by Nature for a widow. She was evidently got up for mourning, and never looked so well as in deep black, with jet ornaments.

The man who should dare to marry her would doom himself; for how could she become the widow she was bound to be, unless he would retire and give her a chance? The Lieutenant lived, however, as we have seen, to become Captain and then Major, with prospects of further advancement. But Mrs. Rowens often said she should never look well in colors. At last her destiny fulfilled itself, and the justice of Nature was vindicated. Major Rowens got overheated galloping about the field on the day of the Great Muster, and had a rush of blood to the head, according to the common report, — at any rate, something which stopped him short in his career of expansion and promotion, and established Mrs. Rowens in her normal condition of widowhood.

The Widow Rowens was now in the full bloom of ornamental sorrow. A very shallow crape bonnet, frilled and froth-like, allowed the parted raven hair to show its glossy smoothness. A jet pin heaved upon her bosom with every sigh of memory, or emotion of unknown origin. Jet bracelets shone with every movement of her slender hands, cased in close-fitting black gloves. Her sable dress was ridged with mani-

fold flounces, from beneath which a small foot showed itself from time to time, clad in the same hue of mourning. Everything about her was dark, except the whites of her eyes and the enamel of her teeth. The effect was complete. Gray's Elegy was not a more perfect composition.

Much as the Widow was pleased with the costume belonging to her condition, she did not disguise from herself that under certain circumstances she might be willing to change her name again. Thus, for instance, if a gentleman not too far gone in maturity, of dignified exterior, with an ample fortune, and of unexceptionable character, should happen to set his heart upon her, and the only way to make him happy was to give up her weeds and go into those unbecoming colors again for his sake, — why, she felt that it was in her nature to make the sacrifice. By a singular coincidence it happened that a gentleman was now living in Rockland who united in himself all these advantages. Who he was, the sagacious reader may very probably have divined. Just to see how it looked, one day, having bolted her door, and drawn the curtains close, and glanced under the sofa, and listened at the keyhole to be sure there was nobody in the entry, — just to see how it looked, she had taken out an envelope and written on the back of it *Mrs. Marilla Venner.* It made her head swim and her knees tremble. What if she should faint, or

die, or have a stroke of palsy, and they should break into the room and find that name written? How she caught it up and tore it into little shreds, and then could not be easy until she had burned the small heap of pieces! But these are things which every honorable reader will consider imparted in strict confidence.

The Widow Rowens, though not of the mansion-house set, was among the most genteel of the two-story circle, and was in the habit of visiting some of the great people. In one of these visits she met a dashing young fellow with an olive complexion at the house of a professional gentleman who had married one of the white necks and pairs of fat arms from a distinguished family before referred to. The professional gentleman himself was out, but the lady introduced the olive-complexioned young man as Mr. Richard Venner.

The Widow was particularly pleased with this accidental meeting. Had heard Mr. Venner's name frequently mentioned. Hoped his uncle was well, and his charming cousin, — was she as original as ever? Had often admired that charming creature he rode: *we* had had some fine horses. Had never got over her taste for riding, but could find nobody that liked a good long gallop since —— well — she couldn't help wishing she was alongside of him, the other day, when she saw him dashing by, just at twilight.

The Widow paused; lifted a flimsy handker-

chief with a very deep black border so as to play the jet bracelet; pushed the tip of her slender foot beyond the lowest of her black flounces; looked up; looked down; looked at Mr. Richard, the very picture of artless simplicity, — as represented in well-played genteel comedy.

"A good bit of stuff," Dick said to himself, — "and something of it left yet; *caramba!*" The Major had not studied points for nothing, and the Widow was one of the right sort. The young man had been a little restless of late, and was willing to vary his routine by picking up an acquaintance here and there. So he took the Widow's hint. He should like to have a scamper of half a dozen miles with her some fine morning.

The Widow was infinitely obliged; was not sure that she could find any horse in the village to suit her; but it was *so* kind in him! Would he not call at Hyacinth Cottage, and let her thank him again there?

Thus began an acquaintance which the Widow made the most of, and on the strength of which she determined to give a tea-party and invite a number of persons of whom we know something already. She took a half-sheet of note-paper and made out her list as carefully as a country "merchant's" "clerk" adds up two and threepence (New-England nomenclature) and twelve and a half cents, figure by figure, and fraction by fraction, before he can be sure they will make half a dollar, without cheating some-

body. After much consideration the list reduced itself to the following names: Mr. Richard Venner and Mrs. Blanche Creamer, the lady at whose house she had met him, — mansion-house breed, — but will come, — soft on Dick; Dudley Venner, — take care of him herself; Elsie, — Dick will see to her, — won't it fidget the Creamer woman to see him round her? the old Doctor, — he's always handy; and there's that young master there, up at the school, — know him well enough to ask him, — oh, yes, he'll come. One, two, three, four, five, six, — seven; not room enough, without the leaf in the table; one place empty, if the leaf's in. Let's see, — Helen Darley, — she'll do well enough to fill it up, — why, yes, just the thing, — light brown hair, blue eyes, — won't my pattern show off well against her? Put her down, — she's worth her tea and toast ten times over, — nobody knows what a "thunder-and-lightning woman," as poor Major used to have it, is, till she gets alongside of one of those old-maidish girls, with hair the color of brown sugar, and eyes like the blue of a teacup.

The Widow smiled with a feeling of triumph at having overcome her difficulties and arranged her party, — arose and stood before her glass, three-quarters front, one-quarter profile, so as to show the whites of the eyes and the down of the upper lip. "Splendid!" said the Widow, — and to tell the truth, she was not far out of the way, and with Helen Darley as a foil anybody would

know she must be foudroyant and pyramidal, — if these French adjectives may be naturalized for this one particular exigency.

So the Widow sent out her notes. The black grief which had filled her heart and overflowed in surges of crape around her person had left a deposit half an inch wide at the margin of her note-paper. Her seal was a small youth with an inverted torch, the same on which Mrs. Blanche Creamer made her spiteful remark, that she expected to see that boy of the Widow's standing on his head yet; meaning, as Dick supposed, that she would get the torch right-side up as soon as she had a chance. That was after Dick had made the Widow's acquaintance, and Mrs. Creamer had got it into her foolish head that she would marry that young fellow, if she could catch him. How could he ever come to fancy such a quadroon-looking thing as that, she should like to know?

It is easy enough to ask seven people to a party; but whether they will come or not is an open question, as it was in the case of the "vasty spirits." If the note issues from a three-story mansion-house, and goes to two-story acquaintances, they will all be in an excellent state of health, and have much pleasure in accepting this very polite invitation. If the note is from the lady of a two-story family to three-story ones, the former highly respectable person will very probably find that an endemic complaint is prev-

alent, not represented in the weekly bills of mortality, which occasions numerous regrets in the bosoms of eminently desirable parties that they *cannot* have the pleasure of and-so-forthing.

In this case there was room for doubt, — mainly as to whether Elsie would take a fancy to come or not. If she should come, her father would certainly be with her. Dick had promised, and thought he could bring Elsie. Of course the young schoolmaster will come, and that poor tired-out looking Helen, — if only to get out of sight of those horrid Peckham wretches. They don't get such invitations every day. The others she felt sure of, — all but the old Doctor, — he might have some horrid patient or other to visit; tell him Elsie Venner's going to be there, — he always likes to have an eye on her, they say, — oh, he'd come fast enough, without any more coaxing.

She wanted the Doctor, particularly. It was odd, but she was afraid of Elsie. She felt as if she should be safe enough, if the old Doctor were there to see to the girl; and then she should have leisure to devote herself more freely to the young lady's father, for whom all her sympathies were in a state of lively excitement.

It was a long time since the Widow had seen so many persons round her table as she had now invited. Better have the plates set and see how they will fill it up with the leaf in. — A little too scattering with only eight plates set; if she could

find two more people, now, that would bring the chairs a little closer, — snug, you know, — which makes the company sociable. The Widow thought over her acquaintances. Why! how stupid! there was her good minister, the same who had married her, and might — might — bury her for aught she knew, and his granddaughter staying with him, — nice little girl, pretty, and not old enough to be dangerous; — for the Widow had no notion of making a tea-party and asking people to it that would be like to stand between her and any little project she might happen to have on anybody's heart, — not she! It was all right now; — Blanche was married and so forth; Letty was a child; Elsie was his daughter; Helen Darley was a nice, worthy drudge, — poor thing! — faded, faded, — colors wouldn't wash, — just what she wanted to show off against. Now, if the Dudley mansion-house people would only come, — that was the great point.

"Here's a note for us, Elsie," said her father, as they sat round the breakfast-table. "Mrs. Rowens wants us all to come to tea."

It was one of "Elsie's days," as Old Sophy called them. The light in her eyes was still, but very bright. She looked up so full of perverse and wilful impulses, that Dick knew he could make her go with him and her father. He had his own motives for bringing her to this determination, — and his own way of setting about it.

"I don't want to go," he said. "What do you say, Uncle?"

"To tell the truth, Richard, I don't much fancy the Major's widow. I don't like to see her weeds flowering out quite so strong. I suppose you don't care about going, Elsie?"

Elsie looked up in her father's face with an expression which he knew but too well. She was just in the state which the plain sort of people call "contrary," when they have to deal with it in animals. She would insist on going to that tea-party; he knew it just as well before she spoke as after she had spoken. If Dick had said he wanted to go and her father had seconded his wishes, she would have insisted on staying at home. It was no great matter, her father said to himself, after all; very likely it would amuse her; the Widow was a lively woman enough, — perhaps a little *comme il ne faut pas* socially, compared with the Thorntons and some other families; but what did he care for these petty village distinctions?

Elsie spoke.

"I mean to go. You must go with me, Dudley. You may do as you like, Dick."

That settled the Dudley-mansion business, of course. They all three accepted, as fortunately did all the others who had been invited.

Hyacinth Cottage was a pretty place enough, a little too much choked round with bushes, and

too much overrun with climbing-roses, which, in the season of slugs and rose-bugs, were apt to show so brown about the leaves and so coleopterous about the flowers, that it might be questioned whether their buds and blossoms made up for these unpleasant animal combinations, — especially as the smell of whale-oil soap was very commonly in the ascendant over that of the roses. It had its patch of grass called "the lawn," and its glazed closet known as "the conservatory," according to that system of harmless fictions characteristic of the rural imagination and shown in the names applied to many familiar objects. The interior of the cottage was more tasteful and ambitious than that of the ordinary two-story dwellings. In place of the prevailing hair-cloth covered furniture, the visitor had the satisfaction of seating himself upon a chair covered with some of the Widow's embroidery, or a sofa luxurious with soft caressing plush. The sporting tastes of the late Major showed in various prints on the wall: Herring's "Plenipotentiary," the "red bullock" of the '34 Derby; "Cadland" and "The Colonel"; "Crucifix"; "West-Australian," fastest of modern racers; and among native celebrities, ugly, game old "Boston," with his straight neck and ragged hips; and gray "Lady Suffolk," queen, in her day, not of the turf but of the track, "extending" herself till she measured a rod, more or less, skimming along within a yard of the ground, her legs opening and shut-

ting under her with a snap, like the four blades of a compound jack-knife.

These pictures were much more refreshing than those dreary fancy death-bed scenes, common in two-story country-houses, in which Washington and other distinguished personages are represented as obligingly devoting their last moments to taking a prominent part in a *tableau*, in which weeping relatives, attached servants, professional assistants, and celebrated personages who might by a stretch of imagination be supposed present, are grouped in the most approved style of arrangement about the chief actor's pillow.

A single glazed bookcase held the family library, which was hidden from vulgar eyes by green silk curtains behind the glass. It would have been instructive to get a look at it, as it always is to peep into one's neighbor's bookshelves. From other sources and opportunities a partial idea of it has been obtained. The Widow had inherited some books from her mother, who was something of a reader: Young's "Night-Thoughts"; "The Preceptor"; "The Task, a Poem," by William Cowper; Hervey's "Meditations"; "Alonzo and Melissa"; "Buccaneers of America"; "The Triumphs of Temper"; "La Belle Assemblée"; Thomson's "Seasons"; and a few others. The Major had brought in "Tom Jones" and "Peregrine Pickle"; various works by Mr. Pierce Egan; "Boxiana"; "The Racing Calendar"; and a "Book of Lively

Songs and Jests." The Widow had added the Poems of Lord Byron and T. Moore; "Eugene Aram"; "The Tower of London," by Harrison Ainsworth; some of Scott's Novels; "The Pickwick Papers"; a volume of Plays, by W. Shakspeare; "Proverbial Philosophy"; "Pilgrim's Progress"; "The Whole Duty of Man" (a present when she was married); with two celebrated religious works, one by William Law and the other by Philip Doddridge, which were sent her after her husband's death, and which she had tried to read, but found that they did not agree with her. Of course the bookcase held a few school manuals and compendiums, and one of Mr. Webster's Dictionaries. But the gilt-edged Bible always lay on the centre-table, next to the magazine with the fashion-plates and the scrap-book with pictures from old annuals and illustrated papers.

The reader need not apprehend the recital, at full length, of such formidable preparations for the Widow's tea-party as were required in the case of Colonel Sprowle's Social Entertainment. A tea-party, even in the country, is a comparatively simple and economical piece of business. As soon as the Widow found that all her company were coming, she set to work, with the aid of her "smart" maid-servant and a daughter of her own, who was beginning to stretch and spread at a fearful rate, but whom she treated as a small child, to make the necessary preparations. The

silver had to be rubbed; also the grand plated urn, — her mother's before hers, — style of the Empire, — looking as if it might have been made to hold the Major's ashes. Then came the making and baking of cake and gingerbread, the smell whereof reached even as far as the sidewalk in front of the cottage, so that small boys returning from school snuffed it in the breeze, and discoursed with each other on its suggestions; so that the Widow Leech, who happened to pass, remembered she hadn't called on Marilly Raowens for a consid'ble spell, and turned in at the gate and rang three times with long intervals, — but all in vain, the inside Widow having "spotted" the outside one through the blinds, and whispered to her aides-de-camp to let the old thing ring away till she pulled the bell out by the roots, but not to stir to open the door.

Widow Rowens was what they called a real smart, capable woman, not very great on books, perhaps, but knew what was what and who was who as well as another, — knew how to make the little cottage look pretty, how to set out a tea-table, and, what a good many women never can find out, knew her own style and "got herself up tip-top," as our young friend Master Geordie, Colonel Sprowle's heir-apparent, remarked to his friend from one of the fresh-water colleges. Flowers were abundant now, and she had dressed her rooms tastefully with them. The centre-table had two or three gilt-edged books

lying carelessly about on it, and some prints, and a stereoscope with stereographs to match, chiefly groups of picnics, weddings, etc., in which the same somewhat fatigued-looking ladies of fashion and brides received the attentions of the same unpleasant-looking young men, easily identified under their different disguises, consisting of fashionable raiment such as gentlemen are supposed to wear habitually. With these, however, were some pretty English scenes, — pretty except for the old fellow with the hanging under-lip who infests every one of that interesting series; and a statue or two, especially that famous one commonly called the Lahcóon, so as to rhyme with moon and spoon, and representing an old man with his two sons in the embraces of two monstrous serpents.

There is no denying that it was a very dashing achievement of the Widow's to bring together so considerable a number of desirable guests. She felt proud of her feat; but as to the triumph of getting Dudley Venner to come out for a visit to Hyacinth Cottage, she was surprised and almost frightened at her own success. So much *might* depend on the impressions of that evening!

The next thing was to be sure that everybody should be in the right place at the tea-table, and this the Widow thought she could manage by a few words to the older guests and a little shuffling about and shifting when they got to the table. To settle everything the Widow made out a dia-

gram, which the reader should have a chance of inspecting in an authentic copy, if these pages were allowed under any circumstances to be the vehicle of illustrations. If, however, he or she really wishes to see the way the pieces stood as they were placed at the beginning of the game, (the Widow's gambit,) he or she had better at once take a sheet of paper, draw an oval, and arrange the characters according to the following schedule.

At the head of the table, the Hostess, Widow Marilla Rowens. Opposite her, at the other end, Rev. Dr. Honeywood. At the *right* of the Hostess, Dudley Venner, next him Helen Darley, next her Dr. Kittredge, next him Mrs. Blanche Creamer, then the Reverend Doctor. At the *left* of the Hostess, Bernard Langdon, next him Letty Forrester, next Letty Mr. Richard Venner, next him Elsie, and so to the Reverend Doctor again.

The company came together a little before the early hour at which it was customary to take tea in Rockland. The Widow knew everybody, of course: who was there in Rockland she did not know? But some of them had to be introduced: Mr. Richard Venner to Mr. Bernard, Mr. Bernard to Miss Letty, Dudley Venner to Miss Helen Darley, and so on. The two young men looked each other straight in the eyes, — both full of youthful life, but one of frank and fearless aspect, the other with a dangerous feline beauty alien to the New England half of his blood.

The guests talked, turned over the prints, looked at the flowers, opened the "Proverbial Philosophy" with gilt edges, and the volume of Plays by W. Shakspeare, examined the horse-pictures on the walls, and so passed away the time until tea was announced, when they paired off for the room where it was in readiness. The Widow had managed it well; everything was just as she wanted it. Dudley Venner was between herself and the poor tired-looking school-mistress with her faded colors. Blanche Creamer, a lax, tumble-to-pieces, *Greuze*-ish looking blonde, whom the Widow hated because the men took to her, was purgatoried between the two old Doctors, and could see all the looks that passed between Dick Venner and his cousin. The young school-master could talk to Miss Letty: it was his business to know how to talk to school-girls. Dick would amuse himself with his cousin Elsie. The old Doctors only wanted to be well fed and they would do well enough.

It would be very pleasant to describe the tea-table; but in reality, it did not pretend to offer a plethoric banquet to the guests. The Widow had not visited at the mansion-houses for nothing, and she had learned there that an overloaded tea-table may do well enough for farm-hands when they come in at evening from their work and sit down unwashed in their shirt-sleeves, but that for decently bred people such an insult to the memory of a dinner not yet half-assimilated is wholly

inadmissible. Everything was delicate, and almost everything of fair complexion: white bread and biscuits, frosted and sponge cake, cream, honey, straw-colored butter; only a shadow here and there, where the fire had crisped and browned the surfaces of a stack of dry toast, or where a preserve had brought away some of the red sunshine of the last year's summer. The Widow shall have the credit of her well-ordered tea-table, also of her bountiful cream-pitchers; for it is well known that city-people find cream a very scarce luxury in a good many country-houses of more pretensions than Hyacinth Cottage. There are no better maxims for ladies who give tea-parties than these: —

Cream is thicker than water.

Large heart never loved little cream-pot.

There is a common feeling in genteel families that the third meal of the day is not so essential a part of the daily bread as to require any especial acknowledgment to the Providence which bestows it. Very devout people, who would never sit down to a breakfast or a dinner without the grace before meat which honors the Giver of it, feel as if they thanked Heaven enough for their tea and toast by partaking of them cheerfully without audible petition or ascription. But the Widow was not exactly mansion-house-bred, and so thought it necessary to give the Reverend Doctor a peculiar look which he understood at once as inviting his professional services. He, therefore, uttered a few

simple words of gratitude, very quietly, — much to the satisfaction of some of the guests, who had expected one of those elaborate effusions, with rolling up of the eyes and rhetorical accents, so frequent with eloquent divines when they address their Maker in genteel company.

Everybody began talking with the person sitting next at hand. Mr. Bernard naturally enough turned his attention first to the Widow; but somehow or other the right side of the Widow seemed to be more wide awake than the left side, next him, and he resigned her to the courtesies of Mr. Dudley Venner, directing himself, not very unwillingly, to the young girl next him on the other side. Miss Letty Forrester, the granddaughter of the Reverend Doctor, was city-bred, as anybody might see, and city-dressed, as any woman would know at sight; a man might only feel the general effect of clear, well-matched colors, of harmonious proportions, of the cut which makes everything cling like a bather's sleeve where a natural outline is to be kept, and ruffle itself up like the hackle of a pitted fighting-cock where art has a right to luxuriate in silken exuberance. How this city-bred and city-dressed girl came to be in Rockland Mr. Bernard did not know, but he knew at any rate that she was his next neighbor and entitled to his courtesies. She was handsome, too, when he came to look, very handsome when he came to look again, — endowed with that city beauty which is like the

beauty of wall-fruit, something finer in certain respects than can be reared off the pavement.

The miserable routinists who keep repeating invidiously Cowper's

> "God made the country and man made the town,"

as if the town were a place to kill out the race in, do not know what they are talking about. Where could they raise such Saint-Michael pears, such Saint-Germains, such Brown Beurrés, as we had until within a few years growing within the walls of our old city-gardens? Is the dark and damp cavern where a ragged beggar hides himself better than a town-mansion which fronts the sunshine and backs on its own cool shadow, with gas and water and all appliances to suit all needs? God made the *cavern* and man made the *house!* What then?

There is no doubt that the pavement keeps a deal of mischief from coming up out of the earth, and, with a dash off of it in summer, just to cool the soles of the feet when it gets too hot, is the best place for many constitutions, as some few practical people have already discovered. And just so these beauties that grow and ripen against the city-walls, these young fellows with cheeks like peaches and young girls with cheeks like nectarines, show that the most perfect forms of artificial life can do as much for the human product as garden-culture for strawberries and blackberries.

If Mr. Bernard had philosophized or prosed in this way, with so pretty, nay, so lovely a neighbor as Miss Letty Forrester waiting for him to speak to her, he would have to be dropped from this narrative as a person unworthy of his good-fortune, and not deserving the kind reader's further notice. On the contrary, he no sooner set his eyes fairly on her than he said to himself that she was charming, and that he wished she were one of his scholars at the Institute. So he began talking with her in an easy way; for he knew something of young girls by this time, and, of course, could adapt himself to a young lady who looked as if she might be not more than fifteen or sixteen years old, and therefore could hardly be a match in intellectual resources for the seventeen and eighteen year-old first-class scholars of the Apollinean Institute. But city-wall-fruit ripens early, and he soon found that this girl's training had so sharpened her wits and stored her memory, that he need not be at the trouble to stoop painfully in order to come down to her level.

The beauty of good-breeding is that it adjusts itself to all relations without effort, true to itself always, however the manners of those around it may change. Self-respect and respect for others, — the sensitive consciousness poises itself in these as the compass in the ship's binnacle balances itself and maintains its true level within the two concentric rings which suspend it on their pivots. This thorough-bred school-girl quite

enchanted Mr. Bernard. He could not understand where she got her style, her way of dress, her enunciation, her easy manners. The minister was a most worthy gentleman, but this was not the Rockland native-born manner; some new element had come in between the good, plain, worthy man and this young girl, fit to be a Crown Prince's partner where there were a thousand to choose from.

He looked across to Helen Darley, for he knew she would understand the glance of admiration with which he called her attention to the young beauty at his side; and Helen knew what a young girl could be, as compared with what too many a one is, as well as anybody.

This poor, dear Helen of ours! How admirable the contrast between her and the Widow on the other side of Dudley Venner! But, what was very odd, that gentleman apparently thought the contrast was to the advantage of this poor, dear Helen. At any rate, instead of devoting himself solely to the Widow, he happened to be just at that moment talking in a very interested and, apparently, not uninteresting way to his right-hand neighbor, who, on her part, never looked more charmingly, — as Mr. Bernard could not help saying to himself, — but, to be sure, he had just been looking at the young girl next him, so that his eyes were brimful of beauty, and may have spilled some of it on the first comer: for you know M. Becquerel has been showing us lately

how everything is phosphorescent; that it soaks itself with light in an instant's exposure, so that it is wet with liquid sunbeams, or, if you will, tremulous with luminous vibrations, when first plunged into the negative bath of darkness, and betrays itself by the light which escapes from its surface.

Whatever were the reason, this poor, dear Helen never looked so sweetly. Her plainly parted brown hair, her meek, blue eyes, her cheek just a little tinged with color, the almost sad simplicity of her dress, and that look he knew so well, — so full of cheerful patience, so sincere, that he had trusted her from the first moment as the believers of the larger half of Christendom trust the Blessed Virgin, — Mr. Bernard took this all in at a glance, and felt as pleased as if it had been his own sister Dorothea Elizabeth that he was looking at. As for Dudley Venner, Mr. Bernard could not help being struck by the animated expression of his countenance. It certainly showed great kindness, on his part, to pay so much attention to this quiet girl, when he had the thunder-and-lightning Widow on the other side of him.

Mrs. Marilla Rowens did not know what to make of it. She had made her tea-party expressly for Mr. Dudley Venner. She had placed him just as she wanted, between herself and a meek, delicate woman who dressed in gray, wore a plain breastpin with hair in it, who taught a pack of

girls up there at the school, and looked as if she were born for a teacher, — the very best foil that she could have chosen; and here was this man, polite enough to herself, to be sure, but turning round to that very undistinguished young person, as if he rather preferred her conversation of the two!

The truth was that Dudley Venner and Helen Darley met as two travellers might meet in the desert, wearied, both of them, with their long journey, one having food, but no water, the other water, but no food. Each saw that the other had been in long conflict with some trial; for their voices were low and tender, as patiently borne sorrow and humbly uttered prayers make every human voice. Through these tones, more than by what they said, they came into natural sympathetic relations with each other. Nothing could be more unstudied. As for Dudley Venner, no beauty in all the world could have so soothed and magnetized him as the very repose and subdued gentleness which the Widow had thought would make the best possible background for her own more salient and effective attractions. No doubt, Helen, on her side, was almost too readily pleased with the confidence this new acquaintance she was making seemed to show her from the very first. She knew so few men of any condition! Mr. Silas Peckham: he was her employer, and she ought to think of him as well as she could; but every time she thought of him it was

with a shiver of disgust. Mr. Bernard Langdon: a noble young man, a true friend, like a brother to her, — God bless him, and send him some young heart as fresh as his own! But this gentleman produced a new impression upon her, quite different from any to which she was accustomed. His rich, low tones had the strangest significance to her; she felt sure he must have lived through long experiences, sorrowful like her own. Elsie's father! She looked into his dark eyes, as she listened to him, to see if they had any glimmer of that peculiar light, diamond-bright, but cold and still, which she knew so well in Elsie's. Anything but that! Never was there more tenderness, it seemed to her, than in the whole look and expression of Elsie's father. She must have been a great trial to him; yet his face was that of one who had been saddened, not soured, by his discipline. Knowing what Elsie must be to him, how hard she must make any parent's life, Helen could not but be struck with the interest Mr. Dudley Venner showed in her as his daughter's instructress. He was too kind to her; again and again she meekly turned from him, so as to leave him free to talk to the showy lady at his other side, who was looking all the while

> "like the night
> Of cloudless realms and starry skies";

but still Mr. Dudley Venner, after a few courteous words, came back to the blue eyes and brown

hair; still he kept his look fixed upon her, and his tones grew sweeter and lower as he became more interested in talk, until this poor, dear Helen, what with surprise, and the bashfulness natural to one who had seen little of the gay world, and the stirring of deep, confused sympathies with this suffering father, whose heart seemed so full of kindness, felt her cheeks glowing with unwonted flame, and betrayed the pleasing trouble of her situation by looking so sweetly as to arrest Mr. Bernard's eye for a moment, when he looked away from the young beauty sitting next him.

Elsie meantime had been silent, with that singular, still, watchful look which those who knew her well had learned to fear. Her head just a little inclined on one side, perfectly motionless for whole minutes, her eyes seeming to grow small and bright, as always when she was under her evil influence, she was looking obliquely at the young girl on the other side of her cousin Dick and next to Bernard Langdon. As for Dick himself, she seemed to be paying very little attention to him. Sometimes her eyes would wander off to Mr. Bernard, and their expression, as old Dr. Kittredge, who watched her for a while pretty keenly, noticed, would change perceptibly. One would have said that she looked with a kind of dull hatred at the girl, but with a half-relenting reproachful anger at Mr. Bernard.

Miss Letty Forrester, at whom Elsie had been looking from time to time in this fixed way, was conscious meanwhile of some unusual influence. First it was a feeling of constraint, — then, as it were, a diminished power over the muscles, as if an invisible elastic cobweb were spinning round her, — then a tendency to turn away from Mr. Bernard, who was making himself very agreeable, and look straight into those eyes which would not leave her, and which seemed to be drawing her towards them, while at the same time they chilled the blood in all her veins.

Mr. Bernard saw this influence coming over her. All at once he noticed that she sighed, and that some little points of moisture began to glisten on her forehead. But she did not grow pale perceptibly; she had no involuntary or hysteric movements; she still listened to him and smiled naturally enough. Perhaps she was only nervous at being stared at. At any rate, she was coming under some unpleasant influence or other, and Mr. Bernard had seen enough of the strange impression Elsie sometimes produced to wish this young girl to be relieved from it, whatever it was. He turned toward Elsie and looked at her in such a way as to draw her eyes upon him. Then he looked steadily and calmly into them. It was a great effort, for some perfectly inexplicable reason. At one instant he thought he could not sit where he was; he must go and

speak to Elsie. Then he wanted to take his eyes away from hers; there was something intolerable in the light that came from them. But he was determined to look her down, and he believed he could do it, for he had seen her countenance change more than once when he had caught her gaze steadily fixed on him. All this took not minutes, but seconds. Presently she changed color slightly, — lifted her head, which was inclined a little to one side, — shut and opened her eyes two or three times, as if they had been pained or wearied, — and turned away baffled, and shamed, as it would seem, and shorn for the time of her singular and formidable or at least evil-natured power of swaying the impulses of those around her.

It takes too long to describe these scenes where a good deal of life is concentrated into a few silent seconds. Mr. Richard Venner had sat quietly through it all, although this short pantomime had taken place literally before his face. He saw what was going on well enough, and understood it all perfectly well. Of course the school-master had been trying to make Elsie jealous, and had succeeded. The little school-girl was a decoy-duck, — that was all. Estates like the Dudley property were not to be had every day, and no doubt the Yankee usher was willing to take some pains to make sure of Elsie. Doesn't Elsie look savage? Dick involuntarily moved his chair a little away from her, and

thought he felt a pricking in the small white scars on his wrist. A dare-devil fellow, but somehow or other this girl had taken strange hold of his imagination, and he often swore to himself, that, when he married her, he would carry a loaded revolver with him to his bridal chamber.

Mrs. Blanche Creamer raged inwardly at first to find herself between the two old gentlemen of the party. It very soon gave her great comfort, however, to see that Marilla Rowens had just missed it in her calculations, and she chuckled immensely to find Dudley Venner devoting himself chiefly to Helen Darley. If the Rowens woman should hook Dudley, she felt as if she should gnaw all her nails off for spite. To think of seeing her barouching about Rockland behind a pair of long-tailed bays and a coachman with a band on his hat, while she, Blanche Creamer, was driving herself about in a one-horse "carriage"! Recovering her spirits by degrees, she began playing her surfaces off at the two old Doctors, just by way of practice. First she heaved up a glaring white shoulder, the right one, so that the Reverend Doctor should be stunned by it, if such a thing might be. The Reverend Doctor was human, as the Apostle was not ashamed to confess himself. Half-devoutly and half-mischievously he repeated inwardly, "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you." As the Reverend Doctor did not show

any lively susceptibility, she thought she would try the left shoulder on old Dr. Kittredge. That worthy and experienced student of science was not at all displeased with the manœuvre, and lifted his head so as to command the exhibition through his glasses. "Blanche is good for half a dozen years or so, if she is careful," the Doctor said to himself, "and then she must take to her prayer-book." After this spasmodic failure of Mrs. Blanche Creamer's to stir up the old Doctors, she returned again to the pleasing task of watching the Widow in her evident discomfiture. But dark as the Widow looked in her half-concealed pet, she was but as a pale shadow, compared to Elsie in her silent concentration of shame and anger.

"Well, there is one good thing," said Mrs. Blanche Creamer; "Dick doesn't get much out of that cousin of his this evening! Doesn't he look handsome, though?"

So Mrs. Blanche, being now a good deal taken up with her observations of those friends of hers and ours, began to be rather careless of her two old Doctors, who naturally enough fell into conversation with each other across the white surfaces of that lady, — perhaps not very politely, but, under the circumstances, almost as a matter of necessity.

When a minister and a doctor get talking together, they always have a great deal to say; and so it happened that the company left the

table just as the two Doctors were beginning to get at each other's ideas about various interesting matters. If we follow them into the other parlor, we can, perhaps, pick up something of their conversation.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHY DOCTORS DIFFER.

The company rearranged itself with some changes after leaving the tea-table. Dudley Venner was very polite to the Widow; but that lady having been called off for a few moments for some domestic arrangement, he slid back to the side of Helen Darley, his daughter's faithful teacher. Elsie had got away by herself, and was taken up in studying the stereoscopic Laocoön. Dick, being thus set free, had been seized upon by Mrs. Blanche Creamer, who had diffused herself over three-quarters of a sofa and beckoned him to the remaining fourth. Mr. Bernard and Miss Letty were having a snug *tête-à-tête* in the recess of a bay-window. The two Doctors had taken two arm-chairs and sat squared off against each other. Their conversation is perhaps as well worth reporting as that of the rest of the company, and, as it was carried on in a louder tone, was of course more easy to gather and put on record.

It was a curious sight enough to see those two representatives of two great professions brought

face to face to talk over the subjects they had been looking at all their lives from such different points of view. Both were old; old enough to have been moulded by their habits of thought and life; old enough to have all their beliefs "fretted in," as vintners say,— thoroughly worked up with their characters. Each of them looked his calling. The Reverend Doctor had lived a good deal among books in his study; the Doctor, as we will call the medical gentleman, had been riding about the country for between thirty and forty years. His face looked tough and weather-worn; while the Reverend Doctor's, hearty as it appeared, was of finer texture. The Doctor's was the graver of the two; there was something of grimness about it,— partly owing to the north-easters he had faced for so many years, partly to long companionship with that stern personage who never deals in sentiment or pleasantry. His speech was apt to be brief and peremptory; it was a way he had got by ordering patients; but he could discourse somewhat, on occasion, as the reader may find out. The Reverend Doctor had an open, smiling expression, a cheery voice, a hearty laugh, and a cordial way with him which some thought too lively for his cloth, but which children, who are good judges of such matters, delighted in, so that he was the favorite of all the little rogues about town. But he had the clerical art of so-

bering down in a moment, when asked to say grace while somebody was in the middle of some particularly funny story; and though his voice was so cheery in common talk, in the pulpit, like almost all preachers, he had a wholly different and peculiar way of speaking, supposed to be more acceptable to the Creator than the natural manner. In point of fact, most of our anti-papal and anti-prelatical clergymen do really *intone* their prayers, without suspecting in the least that they have fallen into such a Romish practice.

This is the way the conversation between the Doctor of Divinity and the Doctor of Medicine was going on at the point where these notes take it up.

"*Ubi tres medici, duo athei*, you know, Doctor. Your profession has always had the credit of being lax in doctrine, — though pretty stringent in *practice*, ha! ha!"

"Some priest said that," the Doctor answered, dryly. "They always talked Latin when they had a bigger lie than common to get rid of."

"Good!" said the Reverend Doctor; "I'm afraid they would lie a little sometimes. But isn't there some truth in it, Doctor? Don't you think your profession is apt to see 'Nature' in the place of the God of Nature, — to lose sight of the great First Cause in their daily study of secondary causes?"

"I've thought about that," the Doctor answered,

"and I've talked about it and read about it, and I've come to the conclusion that nobody believes in God and trusts in God quite so much as the doctors; only it isn't just the sort of Deity that some of your profession have wanted them to take up with. There was a student of mine wrote a dissertation on the Natural Theology of Health and Disease, and took that old lying proverb for his motto. He knew a good deal more about books than ever I did, and had studied in other countries. I'll tell you what he said about it. He said the old Heathen Doctor, Galen, praised God for his handiwork in the human body, just as if he had been a Christian, or the Psalmist himself. He said they had this sentence set up in large letters in the great lecture-room in Paris where he attended: *I dressed his wound and God healed him.* That was an old surgeon's saying. And he gave a long list of doctors who were not only Christians, but famous ones. I grant you, though, ministers and doctors are very apt to see differently in spiritual matters."

"That's it," said the Reverend Doctor; "you are apt to see 'Nature' where we see God, and appeal to 'Science' where we are contented with Revelation."

"We don't separate God and Nature, perhaps, as you do," the Doctor answered. "When we say that God is omnipresent and omnipotent and omniscient, we are a little more apt to mean it

than your folks are. We think, when a wound heals, that God's *presence* and *power* and *knowledge* are there, healing it, just as that old surgeon did. We think a good many theologians, working among their books, don't see the facts of the world they live in. When we tell 'em of these facts, they are apt to call us materialists and atheists and infidels, and all that. We can't help seeing the facts, and we don't think it's wicked to mention 'em."

"Do tell me," the Reverend Doctor said, "some of these facts we are in the habit of overlooking, and which your profession thinks it can see and understand."

"That's very easy," the Doctor replied. "For instance: you don't understand or don't allow for idiosyncrasies as we learn to. We know that food and physic act differently with different people; but you think the same kind of truth is going to suit, or ought to suit, all minds. We don't fight with a patient because he can't take magnesia or opium; but you are all the time quarrelling over your beliefs, as if belief did not depend very much on race and constitution, to say nothing of early training."

"Do you mean to say that every man is not absolutely free to choose his beliefs?"

"The men you write about in your studies are, but not the men we see in the real world. There is some apparently congenital defect in the Indians, for instance, that keeps them from

choosing civilization and Christianity. So with the Gypsies, very likely. Everybody knows that Catholicism or Protestantism is a good deal a matter of race. Constitution has more to do with belief than people think for. I went to a Universalist church, when I was in the city one day, to hear a famous man whom all the world knows, and I never saw such pews-full of broad shoulders and florid faces, and substantial, wholesome-looking persons, male and female, in all my life. Why, it was astonishing. Either their creed made them healthy, or they chose it because they were healthy. Your folks have never got the hang of human nature."

"I am afraid this would be considered a degrading and dangerous view of human beliefs and responsibility for them," the Reverend Doctor replied. "Prove to a man that his will is governed by something outside of himself, and you have lost all hold on his moral and religious nature. There is nothing bad men want to believe so much as that they are governed by necessity. Now that which is at once degrading and dangerous cannot be true."

"No doubt," the Doctor replied, "all large views of mankind limit our estimate of the absolute freedom of the will. But I don't think it degrades or endangers us, for this reason, that, while it makes us charitable to the rest of mankind, our own sense of freedom, whatever it is, is never affected by argument. *Conscience won't be*

reasoned with. We feel that *we* can practically do this or that, and if we choose the wrong, we know we are responsible; but observation teaches us that this or that other race or individual has not the same practical freedom of choice. I don't see how we can avoid this conclusion in the instance of the American Indians. The science of Ethnology has upset a good many theoretical notions about human nature."

"Science!" said the Reverend Doctor, "science! that was a word the Apostle Paul did not seem to think much of, if we may judge by the Epistle to Timothy: 'Oppositions of science falsely so called.' I own that I am jealous of that word and the pretensions that go with it. Science has seemed to me to be very often only the handmaid of skepticism."

"Doctor!" the physician said, emphatically, "science is knowledge. Nothing that is not *known* properly belongs to science. Whenever knowledge obliges us to doubt, we are always safe in doubting. Astronomers foretell eclipses, say how long comets are to stay with us, point out where a new planet is to be found. We see they *know* what they assert, and the poor old Roman Catholic Church has at last to knock under. So Geology *proves* a certain succession of events, and the best Christian in the world must make the earth's history square with it. Besides, I don't think you remember what great revelations of himself the Creator has made in the minds of the men who have built up science. You seem

to me to hold his human masterpieces very cheap. Don't you think the 'inspiration of the Almighty' gave Newton and Cuvier 'understanding'?"

The Reverend Doctor was not arguing for victory. In fact, what he wanted was to call out the opinions of the old physician by a show of opposition, being already predisposed to agree with many of them. He was rather trying the common arguments, as one tries tricks of fence merely to learn the way of parrying. But just here he saw a tempting opening, and could not resist giving a home-thrust.

"Yes; but you surely would not consider it inspiration of the same kind as that of the writers of the Old Testament?"

That cornered the Doctor, and he paused a moment before he replied. Then he raised his head, so as to command the Reverend Doctor's face through his spectacles, and said,—

"I did not say that. You are clear, I suppose, that the Omniscient spoke through Solomon, but that Shakspeare wrote without his help?"

The Reverend Doctor looked very grave. It was a bold, blunt way of putting the question. He turned it aside with the remark, that Shakspeare seemed to him at times to come as near inspiration as any human being not included among the sacred writers.

"Doctor," the physician began, as from a sudden suggestion, "you won't quarrel with me, if I tell you some of my real thoughts, will you?"

"Say on, my dear Sir, say on," the minister answered, with his most genial smile; "your real thoughts are just what I want to get at. A man's real thoughts are a great rarity. If I don't agree with you, I shall like to hear you."

The Doctor began; and in order to give his thoughts more connectedly, we will omit the conversational breaks, the questions and comments of the clergyman, and all accidental interruptions.

"When the old ecclesiastics said that where there were three doctors there were two atheists, they lied, of course. They called everybody who differed from them atheists, until they found out that not believing in God wasn't nearly so ugly a crime as not believing in some particular dogma; then they called them *heretics*, until so many good people had been burned under that name that it began to smell too strong of roasting flesh, — and after that *infidels*, which properly means people without faith, of whom there are not a great many in any place or time. But then, of course, there was some reason why doctors shouldn't think about religion exactly as ministers did, or they never would have made that proverb. It's very likely that something of the same kind is true now; whether it is so or not, I am going to tell you the reasons why it would not be strange, if doctors should take rather different views from clergymen about some matters of belief. I don't, of course, mean all doctors

nor all clergymen. Some doctors go as far as any old New-England divine, and some clergymen agree very well with the doctors that think least according to rule.

"To begin with their ideas of the Creator himself. They always see him trying to help his creatures out of their troubles. A man no sooner gets a cut, than the Great Physician, whose agency we often call *Nature*, goes to work, first to stop the blood, and then to heal the wound, and then to make the scar as small as possible. If a man's pain exceeds a certain amount, he faints, and so gets relief. If it lasts too long, habit comes in to make it tolerable. If it is altogether too bad, he dies. That is the best thing to be done under the circumstances. So you see, the doctor is constantly in presence of a benevolent agency working against a settled order of things, of which pain and disease are the accidents, so to speak. Well, no doubt they find it harder than clergymen to believe that there can be any world or state from which this benevolent agency is wholly excluded. This may be very wrong; but it is not unnatural. They can hardly conceive of a permanent state of being in which cuts would never try to heal, nor habit render suffering endurable. This is one effect of their training.

"Then, again, their attention is very much called to human limitations. Ministers work out the machinery of responsibility in an abstract kind of way; they have a sort of algebra of human

nature, in which *friction* and *strength* (or *weakness*) *of material* are left out. You see, a doctor is in the way of studying children from the moment of birth upwards. For the first year or so he sees that they are just as much pupils of their Maker as the young of any other animals. Well, their Maker trains them to *pure selfishness*. Why? In order that they may be sure to take care of themselves. So you see, when a child comes to be, we will say a year and a day old, and makes his first choice between right and wrong, he is at a disadvantage; for he has that *vis a tergo*, as we doctors call it, that force from behind, of a whole year's life of selfishness, for which he is no more to blame than a calf is to blame for having lived in the same way, purely to gratify his natural appetites. Then we see that baby grow up to a child, and, if he is fat and stout and red and lively, we expect to find him troublesome and noisy, and, perhaps, sometimes disobedient more or less; that's the way each new generation breaks its egg-shell; but if he is very weak and thin, and is one of the kind that may be expected to die early, he will very likely sit in the house all day and read good books about other little sharp-faced children just like himself, who died early, having always been perfectly indifferent to all the out-door amusements of the wicked little red-cheeked children. Some of the little folks we watch grow up to be young women, and occasionally one of them gets nervous, what

we call hysterical, and then that girl will begin to play all sorts of pranks, — to lie and cheat, perhaps, in the most unaccountable way, so that she might seem to a minister a good example of total depravity. We don't see her in that light. We give her iron and valerian, and get her on horseback, if we can, and so expect to make her will come all right again. By-and-by we are called in to see an old baby, threescore years and ten or more old. We find this old baby has never got rid of that first year's teaching which led him to fill his stomach with all he could pump into it, and his hands with everything he could grab. People call him a miser. We are sorry for him; but we can't help remembering his first year's training, and the natural effect of money on the great majority of those that have it. So while the ministers say he 'shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven,' we like to remind them that 'with God all things are possible.'

"Once more, we see all kinds of monomania and insanity. We learn from them to recognize all sorts of queer tendencies in minds supposed to be sane, so that we have nothing but compassion for a large class of persons condemned as sinners by theologians, but considered by us as invalids. We have constant reasons for noticing the transmission of qualities from parents to offspring, and we find it hard to hold a child accountable in any moral point of view for inherited bad temper or tendency to drunkenness, — as hard

as we should to blame him for inheriting gout or asthma. I suppose we are more lenient with human nature than theologians generally are. We know that the spirits of men and their views of the present and the future go up and down with the barometer, and that a permanent depression of one inch in the mercurial column would affect the whole theology of Christendom.

"Ministers talk about the human will as if it stood on a high look-out, with plenty of light, and elbow-room reaching to the horizon. Doctors are constantly noticing how it is tied up and darkened by inferior organization, by disease, and all sorts of crowding interferences, until they get to look upon Hottentots and Indians — and a good many of their own race — as a kind of self-conscious blood-clocks with very limited power of self-determination. That's the *tendency*, I say, of a doctor's experience. But the people to whom they address their statements of the results of their observation belong to the thinking class of the highest races, and *they* are conscious of a great deal of liberty of will. So in the face of the fact that civilization with all it offers has proved a dead failure with the aboriginal races of this country, — on the whole, I say, a dead failure, — they talk as if they knew from their own will all about that of a Digger Indian! We are more apt to go by observation of the facts in the case. We are constantly seeing weakness where you see depravity. I don't say we're *right;* I

only tell what you must often find to be the fact, right or wrong, in talking with doctors. You see, too, our notions of bodily and moral disease, or sin, are apt to go together. We used to be as hard on sickness as you were on sin. We know better now. We don't look at sickness as we used to, and try to poison it with everything that is offensive, — burnt toads and earth-worms and viper-broth, and worse things than these. We know that disease has something back of it which the body isn't to blame for, at least in most cases, and which very often it is trying to get rid of. Just so with sin. I will agree to take a hundred new-born babes of a certain stock and return seventy-five of them in a dozen years true and honest, if not 'pious' children. And I will take another hundred, of a different stock, and put them in the hands of certain Ann-Street or Five-Points teachers, and seventy-five of them will be thieves and liars at the end of the same dozen years. I have heard of an old character, Colonel Jaques, I believe it was, a famous cattle-breeder, who used to say he could breed to pretty much any pattern he wanted to. Well, we doctors see so much of families, how the tricks of the blood keep breaking out, just as much in character as they do in looks, that we can't help feeling as if a great many people hadn't a fair chance to be what is called 'good,' and that there isn't a text in the Bible better worth keeping always in mind than that one, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

"As for our getting any quarter at the hands of theologians, we don't expect it, and have no right to. You don't give each other any quarter. I have had two religious books sent me by friends within a week or two. One is Mr. Brownson's; he is as fair and square as Euclid; a real honest, strong thinker, and one that knows what he is talking about, — for he has tried all sorts of religions, pretty much. He tells us that the Roman Catholic Church is the one 'through which alone we can hope for heaven.' The other is by a worthy Episcopal rector, who appears to write as if he were in earnest, and he calls the Papacy the 'Devil's Masterpiece,' and talks about the 'Satanic scheme' of that very Church 'through which alone,' as Mr. Brownson tells us, 'we can hope for heaven'! What's the use in *our* caring about hard words after this, — 'atheists,' heretics, infidels, and the like? They're, after all, only the cinders picked up out of those heaps of ashes round the stumps of the old stakes where they used to burn men, women, and children for not thinking just like other folks. They'll 'crock' your fingers, but they can't burn us.

"Doctors are the best-natured people in the world, except when they get fighting with each other. And they have some advantages over you. You inherit your notions from a set of priests that had no wives and no children, or none to speak of, and so let their humanity die out of them. It didn't seem much to them to

condemn a few thousand millions of people to purgatory or worse for a mistake of judgment. They didn't know what it was to have a child look up in their faces and say 'Father!' It will take you a hundred or two more years to get decently humanized, after so many centuries of *de*-humanizing celibacy.

"Besides, though our libraries are, perhaps, not commonly quite so big as yours, God opens one book to physicians that a good many of you don't know much about, — the Book of Life. That is none of your dusty folios with black letters between pasteboard and leather, but it is printed in bright red type, and the binding of it is warm and tender to every touch. They reverence that book as one of the Almighty's infallible revelations. They will insist on reading you lessons out of it, whether you call them names or not. These will always be lessons of charity. No doubt, nothing can be more provoking to listen to. But do beg your folks to remember that the Smithfield fires are all out, and that the cinders are very dirty and not in the least dangerous. They'd a great deal better be civil, and not be throwing old proverbs in the doctors' faces, when they say that the man of the old monkish notions is one thing and the man they watch from his cradle to his coffin is something very different."

It has cost a good deal of trouble to work the

Doctor's talk up into this formal shape. Some of his sentences have been rounded off for him, and the whole brought into a more rhetorical form than it could have pretended to, if taken as it fell from his lips. But the exact course of his remarks has been followed, and as far as possible his expressions have been retained. Though given in the form of a discourse, it must be remembered that this was a conversation, much more fragmentary and colloquial than it seems as just read.

The Reverend Doctor was very far from taking offence at the old physician's freedom of speech. He knew him to be honest, kind, charitable, self-denying, wherever any sorrow was to be alleviated, always reverential, with a cheerful trust in the great Father of all mankind. To be sure, his senior deacon, old Deacon Shearer, — who seemed to have got his Scripture-teachings out of the "Vinegar Bible," (the one where *Vineyard* is misprinted *Vinegar*, which a good many people seem to have adopted as the true reading,) — his senior deacon had called Dr. Kittredge an "infidel." But the Reverend Doctor could not help feeling, that, unless the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them," were an interpolation, the Doctor was the better Christian of the two. Whatever his senior deacon might think about it, he said to himself that he shouldn't be surprised if he met the Doctor in heaven yet, inquiring anxiously after old Deacon Shearer.

He was on the point of expressing himself very frankly to the Doctor, with that benevolent smile on his face which had sometimes come near giving offence to the readers of the "Vinegar" edition, but he saw that the physician's attention had been arrested by Elsie. He looked in the same direction himself, and could not help being struck by her attitude and expression. There was something singularly graceful in the curves of her neck and the rest of her figure, but she was so perfectly still that it seemed as if she were hardly breathing. Her eyes were fixed on the young girl with whom Mr. Bernard was talking. He had often noticed their brilliancy, but now it seemed to him that they appeared dull, and the look on her features was as of some passion which had missed its stroke. Mr. Bernard's companion seemed unconscious that she was the object of this attention, and was listening to the young master as if he had succeeded in making himself very agreeable.

Of course Dick Venner had not mistaken the game that was going on. The school-master meant to make Elsie jealous, — and he had done it. That's it: get her savage first, and then come wheedling round her, — a sure trick, if he isn't headed off somehow. But Dick saw well enough that he had better let Elsie alone just now, and thought the best way of killing the evening would be to amuse himself in a little lively talk with Mrs. Blanche Creamer, and incidentally to show

Elsie that he could make himself acceptable to other women, if not to herself.

The Doctor presently went up to Elsie, determined to engage her in conversation and get her out of her thoughts, which he saw, by her look, were dangerous. Her father had been on the point of leaving Helen Darley to go to her, but felt easy enough when he saw the old Doctor at her side, and so went on talking. The Reverend Doctor, being now left alone, engaged the Widow Rowens, who put the best face on her vexation she could, but was devoting herself to all the underground deities for having been such a fool as to ask that pale-faced thing from the Institute to fill up her party.

There is no space left to report the rest of the conversation. If there was anything of any significance in it, it will turn up by-and-by, no doubt. At ten o'clock the Reverend Doctor called Miss Letty, who had no idea it was so late; Mr. Bernard gave his arm to Helen; Mr. Richard saw to Mrs. Blanche Creamer; the Doctor gave Elsie a cautioning look, and went off alone, thoughtful; Dudley Venner and his daughter got into their carriage and were whirled away. The Widow's gambit was played, and she had not won the game.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WILD HUNTSMAN.

The young master had not forgotten the old Doctor's cautions. Without attributing any great importance to the warning he had given him, Mr. Bernard had so far complied with his advice that he was becoming a pretty good shot with the pistol. It was an amusement as good as many others to practise, and he had taken a fancy to it after the first few days.

The popping of a pistol at odd hours in the back-yard of the Institute was a phenomenon more than sufficiently remarkable to be talked about in Rockland. The viscous intelligence of a country-village is not easily stirred by the winds which ripple the fluent thought of great cities, but it holds every straw and entangles every insect that lights upon it. It soon became rumored in the town that the young master was a wonderful shot with the pistol. Some said he could hit a fo'pence-ha'penny at three rod; some, that he had shot a swallow, flying, with a single ball; some, that he snuffed a candle five times out of six at ten paces, and that he could hit

any button in a man's coat he wanted to. In other words, as in all such cases, all the common feats were ascribed to him, as the current jokes of the day are laid at the door of any noted wit, however innocent he may be of them.

In the natural course of things, Mr. Richard Venner, who had by this time made some acquaintances, as we have seen, among that class of the population least likely to allow a live cinder of gossip to go out for want of air, had heard incidentally that the master up there at the Institute was all the time practising with a pistol, that they say he can snuff a candle at ten rods, (that was Mrs. Blanche Creamer's version,) and that he could hit anybody he wanted to right in the eye, as far as he could see the white of it.

Dick did not like the sound of all this any too well. Without believing more than half of it, there was enough to make the Yankee schoolmaster too unsafe to be trifled with. However, shooting at a mark was pleasant work enough; he had no particular objection to it himself. Only he did not care so much for those little popgun affairs that a man carries in his pocket, and with which you couldn't shoot a fellow, — a robber, say, — without getting the muzzle under his nose. Pistols for boys; long-range rifles for men. There was such a gun lying in a closet with the fowling-pieces. He would go out into the fields and see what he could do as a marksman.

The nature of the mark which Dick chose for experimenting upon was singular. He had found some panes of glass which had been removed from an old sash, and he placed these successively before his target, arranging them at different angles. He found that a bullet would go through the glass without glancing or having its force materially abated. It was an interesting fact in physics, and might prove of some practical significance hereafter. Nobody knows what may turn up to render these out-of-the-way facts useful. All this was done in a quiet way in one of the bare spots high up the side of The Mountain. He was very thoughtful in taking the precaution to get so far away; rifle-bullets are apt to glance and come whizzing about people's ears, if they are fired in the neighborhood of houses. Dick satisfied himself that he could be tolerably sure of hitting a pane of glass at a distance of thirty rods, more or less, and that, if there happened to be anything behind it, the glass would not materially alter the force or direction of the bullet.

About this time it occurred to him also that there was an old accomplishment of his which he would be in danger of losing for want of practice, if he did not take some opportunity to try his hand and regain its cunning, if it had begun to be diminished by disuse. For his first trial, he chose an evening when the moon was shining, and after the hour when the Rockland

people were like to be stirring abroad. He was so far established now that he could do much as he pleased without exciting remark.

The prairie horse he rode, the mustang of the Pampas, wild as he was, had been trained to take part in at least one exercise. This was the accomplishment in which Mr. Richard now proposed to try himself. For this purpose he sought the implement of which, as it may be remembered, he had once made an incidental use, — the *lasso*, or long strip of hide with a slip-noose at the end of it. He had been accustomed to playing with such a thong from his boyhood, and had become expert in its use in capturing wild cattle in the course of his adventures. Unfortunately, there were no wild bulls likely to be met with in the neighborhood, to become the subjects of his skill. A stray cow in the road, an ox or a horse in a pasture, must serve his turn, — dull beasts, but moving marks to aim at, at any rate.

Never, since he had galloped in the chase over the Pampas, had Dick Venner felt such a sense of life and power as when he struck the long spurs into his wild horse's flanks, and dashed along the road with the lasso lying like a coiled snake at the saddle-bow. In skilful hands, the silent, bloodless noose, flying like an arrow, but not like that leaving a wound behind it, — sudden as a pistol-shot, but without the tell-tale explosion, — is one of the most fearful and mysterious weapons that arm the hand of man. The

old Romans knew how formidable, even in contest with a gladiator equipped with sword, helmet, and shield, was the almost naked *retiarius*, with his net in one hand and his three-pronged javelin in the other. Once get a net over a man's head, or a cord round his neck, or, what is more frequently done nowadays, *bonnet* him by knocking his hat down over his eyes, and he is at the mercy of his opponent. Our soldiers who served against the Mexicans found this out too well. Many a poor fellow has been lassoed by the fierce riders from the plains, and fallen an easy victim to the captor who had snared him in the fatal noose.

But, imposing as the sight of the wild huntsmen of the Pampas might have been, Dick could not help laughing at the mock sublimity of his situation, as he tried his first experiment on an unhappy milky mother who had strayed from her herd and was wandering disconsolately along the road, laying the dust, as she went, with thready streams from her swollen, swinging udders. "Here goes the Don at the windmill!" said Dick, and tilted full speed at her, whirling the lasso round his head as he rode. The creature swerved to one side of the way, as the wild horse and his rider came rushing down upon her, and presently turned and ran, as only cows and —— it wouldn't be safe to say it — can run. Just before he passed, — at twenty or thirty feet from her, — the lasso shot from his hand, un-

coiling as it flew, and in an instant its loop was round her horns. "Well cast!" said Dick, as he galloped up to her side and dexterously disengaged the lasso. "Now for a horse on the run!"

He had the good luck to find one, presently, grazing in a pasture at the road-side. Taking down the rails of the fence at one point, he drove the horse into the road and gave chase. It was a lively young animal enough, and was easily roused to a pretty fast pace. As his gallop grew more and more rapid, Dick gave the reins to the mustang, until the two horses stretched themselves out in their longest strides. If the first feat looked like play, the one he was now to attempt had a good deal the appearance of real work. He touched the mustang with the spur, and in a few fierce leaps found himself nearly abreast of the frightened animal he was chasing. Once more he whirled the lasso round and round over his head, and then shot it forth, as the rattlesnake shoots his head from the loops against which it rests. The noose was round the horse's neck, and in another instant was tightened so as almost to stop his breath. The prairie horse knew the trick of the cord, and leaned away from the captive, so as to keep the thong tensely stretched between his neck and the peak of the saddle to which it was fastened. Struggling was of no use with a halter round his windpipe, and he very soon began to tremble and stagger, —

blind, no doubt, and with a roaring in his ears as of a thousand battle-trumpets, — at any rate, subdued and helpless. That was enough. Dick loosened his lasso, wound it up again, laid it like a pet snake in a coil at his saddle-bow, turned his horse, and rode slowly along towards the mansion-house.

The place had never looked more stately and beautiful to him than as he now saw it in the moonlight. The undulations of the land, — the grand mountain-screen which sheltered the mansion from the northern blasts, rising with all its hanging forests and parapets of naked rock high towards the heavens, — the ancient mansion, with its square chimneys, and body-guard of old trees, and cincture of low walls with marble-pillared gateways, — the fields, with their various coverings, — the beds of flowers, — the plots of turf, one with a gray column in its centre bearing a sun-dial on which the rays of the moon were idly shining, another with a white stone and a narrow ridge of turf, — over all these objects, harmonized with all their infinite details into one fair whole by the moonlight, the prospective heir, as he deemed himself, looked with admiring eyes.

But while he looked, the thought rose up in his mind like waters from a poisoned fountain, that there was a deep plot laid to cheat him of the inheritance which by a double claim he meant to call his own. Every day this ice-cold beauty, this dangerous, handsome cousin of his, went up

to that place, — that usher's girl-trap. Every day, — regularly now, — it used to be different. Did she go only to get out of his, her cousin's, reach? Was she not rather becoming more and more involved in the toils of this plotting Yankee?

If Mr. Bernard had shown himself at that moment a few rods in advance, the chances are that in less than one minute he would have found himself with a noose round his neck, at the heels of a mounted horseman. Providence spared him for the present. Mr. Richard rode his horse quietly round to the stable, put him up, and proceeded towards the house. He got to his bed without disturbing the family, but could not sleep. The idea had fully taken possession of his mind that a deep intrigue was going on which would end by bringing Elsie and the school-master into relations fatal to all his own hopes. With that ingenuity which always accompanies jealousy, he tortured every circumstance of the last few weeks so as to make it square with this belief. From this vein of thought he naturally passed to a consideration of every possible method by which the issue he feared might be avoided.

Mr. Richard talked very plain language with himself in all these inward colloquies. Supposing it came to the worst, what could be done then? First, an accident might happen to the school-master which should put a complete and final check upon his projects and contrivances. The particular accident which might interrupt his

career must, evidently, be determined by circumstances; but it must be of a nature to explain itself without the necessity of any particular person's becoming involved in the matter. It would be unpleasant to go into particulars; but everybody knows well enough that men sometimes get in the way of a stray bullet, and that young persons occasionally do violence to themselves in various modes, — by fire-arms, suspension, and other means, — in consequence of disappointment in love, perhaps, oftener than from other motives. There was still another kind of accident which might serve his purpose. If anything should happen to Elsie, it would be the most natural thing in the world that his uncle should adopt him, his nephew and only near relation, as his heir. Unless, indeed, Uncle Dudley should take it into his head to marry again. In that case, where would he, Dick, be? This was the most detestable complication which he could conceive of. And yet he had noticed — he could not help noticing — that his uncle had been very attentive to, and, as it seemed, very much pleased with, that young woman from the school. What did that mean? Was it possible that he was going to take a fancy to her?

It made him wild to think of all the several contingencies which might defraud him of that good-fortune which seemed but just now within his grasp. He glared in the darkness at imaginary faces: sometimes at that of the handsome,

treacherous school-master; sometimes at that of the meek-looking, but, no doubt, scheming, lady-teacher; sometimes at that of the dark girl whom he was ready to make his wife; sometimes at that of his much respected uncle, who, of course, could not be allowed to peril the fortunes of his relatives by forming a new connection. It was a frightful perplexity in which he found himself, because there was no one single life an accident to which would be sufficient to insure the fitting and natural course of descent to the great Dudley property. If it had been a simple question of helping forward a casualty to any one person, there was nothing in Dick's habits of thought and living to make that a serious difficulty. He had been so much with lawless people, that a life between his wish and his object seemed only as an obstacle to be removed, provided the object were worth the risk and trouble. But if there were two or three lives in the way, manifestly that altered the case.

His Southern blood was getting impatient. There was enough of the New-Englander about him to make him calculate his chances before he struck; but his plans were liable to be defeated at any moment by a passionate impulse such as the dark-hued races of Southern Europe and their descendants are liable to. He lay in his bed, sometimes arranging plans to meet the various difficulties already mentioned, sometimes getting into a paroxysm of blind rage in the perplexity

of considering what object he should select as the one most clearly in his way. On the whole, there could be no doubt where the most threatening of all his embarrassments lay. It was in the probable growing relation between Elsie and the school-master. If it should prove, as it seemed likely, that there was springing up a serious attachment tending to a union between them, he knew what he should do, if he was not quite so sure how he should do it.

There was one thing at least which might favor his projects, and which, at any rate, would serve to amuse him. He could, by a little quiet observation, find out what were the school-master's habits of life: whether he had any routine which could be calculated upon; and under what circumstances a strictly private interview of a few minutes with him might be reckoned on, in case it should be desirable. He could also very probably learn some facts about Elsie: whether the young man was in the habit of attending her on her way home from school; whether she stayed about the school-room after the other girls had gone; and any incidental matters of interest which might present themselves.

He was getting more and more restless for want of some excitement. A mad gallop, a visit to Mrs. Blanche Creamer, who had taken such a fancy to him, or a chat with the Widow Rowens, who was very lively in her talk, for all her sombre colors, and reminded him a good deal of

some of his earlier friends, the *señoritas*, — all these were distractions, to be sure, but not enough to keep his fiery spirit from fretting itself in longings for more dangerous excitements. The thought of getting a knowledge of all Mr. Bernard's ways, so that he would be in his power at any moment, was a happy one.

For some days after this he followed Elsie at a long distance behind, to watch her until she got to the school-house. One day he saw Mr. Bernard join her: a mere accident, very probably, for it was only once this happened. She came on her homeward way alone, — quite apart from the groups of girls who strolled out of the school-house yard in company. Sometimes she was behind them all, — which was suggestive. Could she have stayed to meet the school-master?

If he could have smuggled himself into the school, he would have liked to watch her there, and see if there was not some understanding between her and the master which betrayed itself by look or word. But this was beyond the limits of his audacity, and he had to content himself with such cautious observations as could be made at a distance. With the aid of a pocket-glass he could make out persons without the risk of being observed himself.

Mr. Silas Peckham's corps of instructors was not expected to be off duty or to stand at ease for any considerable length of time. Sometimes Mr. Bernard, who had more freedom than the

rest, would go out for a ramble in the daytime; but more frequently it would be in the evening, after the hour of "retiring," as bedtime was elegantly termed by the young ladies of the Apollinean Institute. He would then not unfrequently walk out alone in the common roads, or climb up the sides of The Mountain, which seemed to be one of his favorite resorts. Here, of course, it was impossible to follow him with the eye at a distance. Dick had a hideous, gnawing suspicion that somewhere in these deep shades the schoolmaster might meet Elsie, whose evening wanderings he knew so well. But of this he was not able to assure himself. Secrecy was necessary to his present plans, and he could not compromise himself by over-eager curiosity. One thing he learned with certainty. The master returned, after his walk one evening, and entered the building where his room was situated. Presently a light betrayed the window of his apartment. From a wooded bank, some thirty or forty rods from this building, Dick Venner could see the interior of the chamber, and watch the master as he sat at his desk, the light falling strongly upon his face, intent upon the book or manuscript before him. Dick contemplated him very long in this attitude. The sense of watching his every motion, himself meanwhile utterly unseen, was delicious. How little the master was thinking what eyes were on him!

Well, — there were two things quite certain.

One was, that, if he chose, he could meet the school-master alone, either in the road or in a more solitary place, if he preferred to watch his chance for an evening or two. The other was, that he commanded his position, as he sat at his desk in the evening, in such a way that there would be very little difficulty, — so far as that went; of course, however, silence is always preferable to noise, and there is a great difference in the marks left by different casualties. Very likely nothing would come of all this espionage; but, at any rate, the first thing to be done with a man you want to have in your power is to learn his habits.

Since the tea-party at the Widow Rowens's, Elsie had been more fitful and moody than ever. Dick understood all this well enough, you know. It was the working of her jealousy against that young school-girl to whom the master had devoted himself for the sake of piquing the heiress of the Dudley mansion. Was it possible, in any way, to exasperate her irritable nature against him, and in this way to render her more accessible to his own advances? It was difficult to influence her at all. She endured his company without seeming to enjoy it. She watched him with that strange look of hers, sometimes as if she were on her guard against him, sometimes as if she would like to strike at him as in that fit of childish passion. She ordered him about with a haughty indifference which reminded him of his

own way with the dark-eyed women whom he had known so well of old. All this added a secret pleasure to the other motives he had for worrying her with jealous suspicions. He knew she brooded silently on any grief that poisoned her comfort, — that she fed on it, as it were, until it ran with every drop of blood in her veins, — and that, except in some paroxysm of rage, of which he himself was not likely the second time to be the object, or in some deadly vengeance wrought secretly, against which he would keep a sharp lookout, so far as he was concerned, she had no outlet for her dangerous, smouldering passions.

Beware of the woman who cannot find free utterance for all her stormy inner life either in words or song! So long as a woman can talk, there is nothing she cannot bear. If she cannot have a companion to listen to her woes, and has no musical utterance, vocal or instrumental, — then, if she is of the real woman sort, and has a few heartfuls of wild blood in her, and you have done her a wrong, — double-bolt the door which she may enter on noiseless slipper at midnight, — look twice before you taste of any cup whose draught the shadow of her hand may have darkened!

But let her talk, and, above all, cry, or, if she is one of the coarser-grained tribe, give her the run of all the red-hot expletives in the language,

and let her blister her lips with them until she is tired, she will sleep like a lamb after it, and you may take a cup of coffee from her without stirring it up to look for its sediment.

So, if she can sing, or play on any musical instrument, all her wickedness will run off through her throat or the tips of her fingers. How many tragedies find their peaceful catastrophe in fierce roulades and strenuous bravuras! How many murders are executed in double-quick time upon the keys which stab the air with their dagger-strokes of sound! What would our civilization be without the piano? Are not Erard and Broadwood and Chickering the true humanizers of our time? Therefore do I love to hear the all-pervading *tum tum* jarring the walls of little parlors in houses with double door-plates on their portals, looking out on streets and courts which to know is to be unknown, and where to exist is not to live, according to any true definition of living. Therefore complain I not of modern degeneracy, when, even from the open window of the small unlovely farm-house, tenanted by the hard-handed man of bovine flavors and the flat-patterned woman of broken-down countenance, issue the same familiar sounds. For who knows that Almira, but for these keys, which throb away her wild impulses in harmless discords, would not have been floating, dead, in the brown stream which slides through the meadows by her father's door, — or living, with that other current which runs

beneath the gas-lights over the slimy pavement, choking with wretched weeds that were once in spotless flower?

Poor Elsie! She never sang nor played. She never shaped her inner life in words: such utterance was as much denied to her nature as common articulate speech to the deaf mute. Her only language must be in action. Watch her well by day and by night, Old Sophy! watch her well! or the long line of her honored name may close in shame, and the stately mansion of the Dudleys remain a hissing and a reproach till its roof is buried in its cellar!

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON HIS TRACKS.

"ABEL!" said the old Doctor, one morning, 'after you've harnessed Caustic, come into the study a few minutes, will you?"

Abel nodded. He was a man of few words, and he knew that the "will you" did not require an answer, being the true New-England way of rounding the corners of an employer's order, — a tribute to the personal independence of an American citizen.

The hired man came into the study in the course of a few minutes. His face was perfectly still, and he waited to be spoken to; but the Doctor's eye detected a certain meaning in his expression, which looked as if he had something to communicate.

"Well?" said the Doctor.

"He's up to mischief o' some kind, I guess," said Abel. "I jest happened daown by the mansion-haouse last night, 'n' he come aout o' the gate on that queer-lookin' creatur' o' his. I watched him, 'n' he rid, very slow, all raoun' by the Institoot, 'n' acted as ef he was spyin' abaout. He

looks to me like a man that's calc'latin' to do some kind of ill-turn to somebody. I shouldn't like to have him raoun' me, 'f there wa'n't a pitchfork or an eel-spear or some sech weep'n within reach. He may be all right; but I don't like his looks, 'n' I don't see what he's lurkin' raoun' the Institoot for, after folks is abed."

"Have you watched him pretty close for the last few days?" said the Doctor.

"W'll, yes, — I've had my eye on him consid'-ble o' the time. I haf to be pooty shy abaout it, or he'll find aout th't I'm on his tracks. I don' want him to get a spite ag'inst me, 'f I c'n help it; he looks to me like one o' them kind that kerries what they call slung-shot, 'n' hits ye on the side o' th' head with 'em so suddin y' never know what hurts ye."

"Why," said the Doctor, sharply, — "have you ever seen him with any such weapon about him?"

"W'll, no, — I caän't say that I hev," Abel answered. "On'y he looks kin' o' dangerous. Maybe he's all jest 'z he ought to be, — I caän't say that he a'n't, — but he's aout late nights, 'n' lurkin' raoun' jest 'z ef he wus spyin' somebody; 'n' somehaow I caän't help mistrustin' them Portagee-lookin' fellahs. I caän't keep the run o' this chap all the time; but I've a notion that old black woman daown 't the mansion-haouse knows 'z much abaout him 'z anybody."

The Doctor paused a moment, after hearing

this report from his private detective, and then got into his chaise, and turned Caustic's head in the direction of the Dudley mansion. He had been suspicious of Dick from the first. He did not like his mixed blood, nor his looks, nor his ways. He had formed a conjecture about his projects early. He had made a shrewd guess as to the probable jealousy Dick would feel of the school-master, had found out something of his movements, and had cautioned Mr. Bernard, — as we have seen. He felt an interest in the young man, — a student of his own profession, an intelligent and ingenuously unsuspecting young fellow, who had been thrown by accident into the companionship or the neighborhood of two persons, one of whom he knew to be dangerous, and the other he believed instinctively might be capable of crime.

The Doctor rode down to the Dudley mansion solely for the sake of seeing Old Sophy. He was lucky enough to find her alone in her kitchen. He began talking with her as a physician; he wanted to know how her rheumatism had been. The shrewd old woman saw through all that with her little beady black eyes. It was something quite different he had come for, and Old Sophy answered very briefly for her aches and ails.

"Old folks' bones a'n't like young folks'," she said. "It's the Lord's doin's, 'n' 't a'n't much matter. I sha'n' be long roun' this kitchen. It's the young Missis, Doctor, — it's our Elsie, — it's

the baby, as we use' t' call her, — don' you remember, Doctor? Seventeen year ago, 'n' her poor mother cryin' for her, — 'Where is she? where is she? Let me see her!' — 'n' how I run up-stairs, — I could run then, — 'n' got the coral necklace 'n' put it round her little neck, 'n' then showed her to her mother, — 'n' how her mother looked at her, 'n' looked, 'n' then put out her poor thin fingers 'n' lifted the necklace, — 'n' fell right back on her piller, as white as though she was laid out to bury?"

The Doctor answered her by silence and a look of grave assent. He had never chosen to let Old Sophy dwell upon these matters, for obvious reasons. The girl must not grow up haunted by perpetual fears and prophecies, if it were possible to prevent it.

"Well, how has Elsie seemed of late?" he said, after this brief pause.

The old woman shook her head. Then she looked up at the Doctor so steadily and searchingly that the diamond eyes of Elsie herself could hardly have pierced more deeply.

The Doctor raised his head, by his habitual movement, and met the old woman's look with his own calm and scrutinizing gaze, sharpened by the glasses through which he now saw her.

Sophy spoke presently in an awed tone, as if telling a vision.

"We shall be havin' trouble before long. The' 's somethin' comin' from the Lord. I've

had dreams, Doctor. It's many a year I've been a-dreamin', but now they're comin' over 'n' over the same thing. Three times I've dreamed one thing, Doctor, — one thing!"

"And what was that?" the Doctor said, with that shade of curiosity in his tone which a metaphysician would probably say is an index of a certain tendency to belief in the superstition to which the question refers.

"I ca'n' jestly tell y' what it was, Doctor," the old woman answered, as if bewildered and trying to clear up her recollections; "but it was somethin' fearful, with a great noise 'n' a great cryin' o' people, — like the Las' Day, Doctor! The Lord have mercy on my poor chil', 'n' take care of her, if anything happens! But I's feared she'll never live to see the Las' Day, 'f 't don' come pooty quick."

Poor Sophy, only the third generation from cannibalism, was, not unnaturally, somewhat confused in her theological notions. Some of the Second-Advent preachers had been about, and circulated their predictions among the kitchen-population of Rockland. This was the way in which it happened that she mingled her fears in such a strange manner with their doctrines.

The Doctor answered solemnly, that of the day and hour we knew not, but it became us to be always ready. — "Is there anything going on in the household different from common?"

Old Sophy's wrinkled face looked as full of

life and intelligence, when she turned it full upon the Doctor, as if she had slipped off her infirmities and years like an outer garment. All those fine instincts of observation which came straight to her from her savage grandfather looked out of her little eyes. She had a kind of faith that the Doctor was a mighty conjurer, who, if he would, could bewitch any of them. She had relieved her feelings by her long talk with the minister, but the Doctor was the immediate adviser of the family, and had watched them through all their troubles. Perhaps he could tell them what to do. She had but one real object of affection in the world, — this child that she had tended from infancy to womanhood. Troubles were gathering thick 'round her; how soon they would break upon her, and blight or destroy her, no one could tell; but there was nothing in all the catalogue of terrors which might not come upon the household at any moment. Her own wits had sharpened themselves in keeping watch by day and night, and her face had forgotten its age in the excitement which gave life to its features.

"Doctor," Old Sophy said, "there's strange things goin' on here by night and by day. I don' like that man, — that Dick, — I never liked him. He giv' me some o' these things I' got on; I take 'em 'cos I know it make him mad, if I no take 'em; I wear 'em, so that he needn' feel as if I didn' like him; but, Doctor, I hate him, — jes' as much as a member o' the church has the Lord's leave to hate anybody."

Her eyes sparkled with the old savage light, as if her ill-will to Mr. Richard Venner might perhaps go a little farther than the Christian limit she had assigned. But remember that her grandfather was in the habit of inviting his friends to dine with him upon the last enemy he had bagged, and that her grandmother's teeth were filed down to points, so that they were as sharp as a shark's.

"What is that you have seen about Mr. Richard Venner that gives you such a spite against him, Sophy?" asked the Doctor.

"What I' seen 'bout Dick Venner?" she replied, fiercely. "I'll tell y' what I' seen. Dick wan's to marry our Elsie, — that's what he wan's; 'n' he don' love her, Doctor, — he hates her, Doctor, as bad as I hate him! He wan's to marry our Elsie, 'n' live here in the big house, 'n' have nothin' to do but jes' lay still 'n' watch Massa Venner 'n' see how long 't 'll take him to die, 'n' 'f he don' die fas' 'nuff, help him some way t' die fasser! — Come close up t' me, Doctor! I wan' t' tell you somethin' I tol' th' minister t'other day. Th' minister, he come down 'n' prayed 'n' talked good, — he's a good man, that Doctor Honeywood, 'n' I tol' him all 'bout our Elsie, — but he didn' tell nobody what to do to stop all what I been dreamin' about happenin'. Come close up to me, Doctor!"

The Doctor drew his chair close up to that of the old woman.

"Doctor, nobody mus'n' never marry our Elsie 's long 's she lives! Nobody mus'n' never live with

Elsie but Ol' Sophy; 'n' Ol' Sophy won't never die 's long 's Elsie 's alive to be took care of. But I's feared, Doctor, I's greatly feared Elsie wan' to marry somebody. The' 's a young gen'l'm'n up at that school where she go, — so some of 'em tells me, — 'n' she loves t' see him 'n' talk wi' him, 'n' she talks about him when she's asleep sometimes. She mus'n' never marry nobody, Doctor! If she do, he die, certain!"

"If she has a fancy for the young man up at the school there," the Doctor said, "I shouldn't think there would be much danger from Dick."

"Doctor, nobody know nothin' 'bout Elsie but Ol' Sophy. She no like any other creatur' th't ever drawed the bref o' life. If she ca'n' marry one man 'cos she love him, she marry another man 'cos she hate him."

"Marry a man because she hates him, Sophy? No woman ever did such a thing as that, or ever will do it."

"Who tol' you Elsie was a woman, Doctor?" said Old Sophy, with a flash of strange intelligence in her eyes.

The Doctor's face showed that he was startled. The old woman could not know much about Elsie that he did not know; but what strange superstition had got into her head, he was puzzled to guess. He had better follow Sophy's lead and find out what she meant.

"I should call Elsie a woman, and a very handsome one," he said. "You don't mean that she

has any mark about her, except — you know — under the necklace?"

The old woman resented the thought of any deformity about her darling.

"I didn' say she had nothin' — but jes' that — you know. My beauty have anything ugly? She's the beautifullest-shaped lady that ever had a shinin' silk gown drawed over her shoulders. On'y she a'n't like no other woman in none of her ways. She don't cry 'n' laugh like other women. An' she ha'n' got the same kind o' feelin's as other women. — Do you know that young gen'l'm'n up at the school, Doctor?"

"Yes, Sophy, I've met him sometimes. He's a very nice sort of young man, handsome, too, and I don't much wonder Elsie takes to him. Tell me, Sophy, what do you think would happen, if he should chance to fall in love with Elsie, and she with him, and he should marry her?"

"Put your ear close to my lips, Doctor, dear!" She whispered a little to the Doctor, then added aloud, "He die, — that's all."

"But surely, Sophy, you a'n't afraid to have Dick marry her, if she would have him for any reason, are you? He can take care of himself, if anybody can."

"Doctor!" Sophy answered, "nobody can take care of hisself that live wi' Elsie! Nobody never in all this worl' mus' live wi' Elsie but Ol' Sophy, I tell you. You don' think I care for Dick? What do I care, if Dick Venner die? He wan's

to marry our Elsie so 's to live in the big house 'n' get all the money 'n' all the silver things 'n' all the chists full o' linen 'n' beautiful clothes! That's what Dick wan's. An' he hates Elsie 'cos she don' like him. But if he marry Elsie, she'll make him die some wrong way or other, 'n' they'll take her 'n' hang her, or he'll get mad with her 'n' choke her. — Oh, I know his chokin' tricks! — he don' leave his keys roun' for nothin'!"

"What's that you say, Sophy? Tell me what you mean by all that."

So poor Sophy had to explain certain facts not in all respects to her credit. She had taken the opportunity of his absence to look about his chamber, and, having found a key in one of his drawers, had applied it to a trunk, and, finding that it opened the trunk, had made a kind of inspection for contraband articles, and, seeing the end of a leather thong, had followed it up until she saw that it finished with a noose, which, from certain appearances, she inferred to have seen service of at least doubtful nature. An unauthorized search; but Old Sophy considered that a game of life and death was going on in the household, and that she was bound to look out for her darling.

The Doctor paused a moment to think over this odd piece of information. Without sharing Sophy's belief as to the kind of use this mischievous-looking piece of property had been put to, it was certainly very odd that Dick should have such a thing at the bottom of his trunk. The Doctor re-

membered reading or hearing something about the *lasso* and the *lariat* and the *bolas*, and had an indistinct idea that they had been sometimes used as weapons of warfare or private revenge; but they were essentially a huntsman's implements, after all, and it was not very strange that this young man had brought one of them with him. Not strange, perhaps, but worth noting.

"Do you really think Dick means mischief to anybody, that he has such dangerous-looking things?" the Doctor said, presently.

"I tell you, Doctor. Dick means to have Elsie. If he ca'n' get her, he never let nobody else have her. Oh, Dick's a dark man, Doctor! I know him! I 'member him when he was little boy, — he always cunnin'. I think he mean mischief to somebody. He come home late nights, — come in softly, — oh, I hear him! I lay awake, 'n' got sharp ears, — I hear the cats walkin' over the roofs, — 'n' I hear Dick Venner, when he comes up in his stockin'-feet as still as a cat. I think he mean mischief to somebody. I no like his looks these las' days. — Is that a very pooty gen'l'm'n up at the school-house, Doctor?"

"I told you he was good-looking. What if he is?"

"I should like to see him, Doctor, — I should like to see the pooty gen'l'm'n that my poor Elsie loves. She mus'n' never marry nobody, — but, oh, Doctor, I should like to see him, 'n' jes' think a little how it would ha' been, if the Lord hadn' been so hard on Elsie."

She wept and wrung her hands. The kind Doctor was touched, and left her a moment to her thoughts.

"And how does Mr. Dudley Venner take all this?" he said, by way of changing the subject a little.

"Oh, Massa Venner, he good man, but he don' know nothin' 'bout Elsie, as Ol' Sophy do. I keep close by her; I help her when she go to bed, 'n' set by her sometime when she 'sleep; I come to her in th' mornin' 'n' help her put on her things." — Then, in a whisper, — "Doctor, Elsie lets Ol' Sophy take off that necklace for her. What you think she do, 'f anybody else tech it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Sophy, — strike the person, perhaps."

"Oh, yes, strike 'em! but not with her han's, Doctor!" — The old woman's significant pantomime must be guessed at.

"But you haven't told me, Sophy, what Mr. Dudley Venner thinks of his nephew, nor whether he has any notion that Dick wants to marry Elsie."

"I tell you. Massa Venner, he good man, but he no see nothin' 'bout what goes on here in the house. He sort o' broken-hearted, you know, — sort o' giv' up, — don' know what to do wi' Elsie, 'xcep' say 'Yes, yes.' Dick always look smilin' 'n' behave well before him. One time I thought Massa Venner b'lieve Dick was goin' to take to

Elsie; but now he don' seem to take much notice; — he kin' o' stupid-like 'bout sech things. It's trouble, Doctor; 'cos Massa Venner bright man naterally, — 'n' he's got a great heap o' books. I don' think Massa Venner never been jes' heself sence Elsie's born. He done all he know how, — but, Doctor, that wa'n' a great deal. You men-folks don' know nothin' 'bout these young gals; 'n' 'f you knowed all the young gals that ever lived, y' wouldn' know nothin' 'bout our Elsie."

"No, — but, Sophy, what I want to know is, whether you think Mr. Venner has any kind of suspicion about his nephew, — whether he has any notion that he's a dangerous sort of fellow, — or whether he feels safe to have him about, or has even taken a sort of fancy to him."

"Lor' bless you, Doctor, Massa Venner no more idee 'f any mischief 'bout Dick than he has 'bout you or me. Y' see, he very fond o' the Cap'n, — that Dick's father, — 'n' he live so long alone here, 'long wi' us, that he kin' o' like to see mos' anybody 't 's got any o' th' ol' family-blood in 'em. He ha'n't got no more suspicions 'n a baby, — y' never see sech a man 'n y'r life. I kin' o' think he don' care for nothin' in this world 'xcep' jes' t' do what Elsie wan's him to. The fus' year after young Madam die he do nothin' but jes' set at the window 'n' look out at her grave, 'n' then come up 'n' look at the baby's neck 'n' say, '*It's fadin'*, *Sophy*, *a'n't it?*' 'n' then go down in the study 'n' walk 'n' walk, 'n'

then kneel down 'n' pray. Doctor, there was two places in the old carpet that was all threadbare, where his knees had worn 'em. An' sometimes, — you remember 'bout all that, — he'd go off up into The Mountain, 'n' be gone all day, 'n' kill all the Ugly Things he could find up there. — Oh, Doctor, I don' like to think o' them days! — An' by-'n'-by he grew kin' o' still, 'n' begun to read a little, 'n' 't las' he got 's quiet 's a lamb, 'n' that's the way he is now. I think he's got religion, Doctor; but he a'n't so bright about what's goin' on, 'n' I don' believe he never suspec' nothin' till somethin' happens; — for the' 's somethin' goin' to happen, Doctor, if the Las' Day doesn' come to stop it; 'n' you mus' tell us what to do, 'n' save my poor Elsie, my baby that the Lord hasn' took care of like all his other childer."

The Doctor assured the old woman that he was thinking a great deal about them all, and that there were other eyes on Dick besides her own. Let her watch him closely about the house, and he would keep a look-out elsewhere. If there was anything new, she must let him know at once. Send up one of the men-servants, and he would come down at a moment's warning.

There was really nothing definite against this young man; but the Doctor was sure that he was meditating some evil design or other. He rode straight up to the Institute. There he saw

Mr. Bernard, and had a brief conversation with him, principally on matters relating to his personal interests.

That evening, for some unknown reason, Mr. Bernard changed the place of his desk and drew down the shades of his windows. Late that night Mr. Richard Venner drew the charge of a rifle, and put the gun back among the fowling-pieces, swearing that a leather halter was worth a dozen of it.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PERILOUS HOUR.

Up to this time Dick Venner had not decided on the particular mode and the precise period of relieving himself from the unwarrantable interference which threatened to defeat his plans. The luxury of feeling that he had his man in his power was its own reward. One who watches in the dark, outside, while his enemy, in utter unconsciousness, is illuminating his apartment and himself so that every movement of his head and every button on his coat can be seen and counted, experiences a peculiar kind of pleasure, if he holds a loaded rifle in his hand, which he naturally hates to bring to its climax by testing his skill as a marksman upon the object of his attention.

Besides, Dick had two sides in his nature, almost as distinct as we sometimes observe in those persons who are the subjects of the condition known as *double consciousness*. On his New-England side he was cunning and calculating, always cautious, measuring his distance before he risked his stroke, as nicely as if he were

throwing his lasso. But he was liable to intercurrent fits of jealousy and rage, such as the light-hued races are hardly capable of conceiving, — blinding paroxysms of passion, which for the time overmastered him, and which, if they found no ready outlet, transformed themselves into the more dangerous forces that worked through the instrumentality of his cool craftiness.

He had failed as yet in getting any positive evidence that there was any relation between Elsie and the school-master other than such as might exist unsuspected and unblamed between a teacher and his pupil. A book, or a note, even, did not prove the existence of any sentiment. At one time he would be devoured by suspicions, at another he would try to laugh himself out of them. And in the mean while he followed Elsie's tastes as closely as he could, determined to make some impression upon her, — to become a habit, a convenience, a necessity, — whatever might aid him in the attainment of the one end which was now the aim of his life.

It was to humor one of her tastes already known to the reader, that he said to her one morning, — "Come, Elsie, take your castanets, and let us have a dance."

He had struck the right vein in the girl's fancy, for she was in the mood for this exercise, and very willingly led the way into one of the more empty

apartments. What there was in this particular kind of dance which excited her it might not be easy to guess; but those who looked in with the old Doctor, on a former occasion, and saw her, will remember that she was strangely carried away by it, and became almost fearful in the vehemence of her passion. The sound of the castanets seemed to make her alive all over. Dick knew well enough what the exhibition would be, and was almost afraid of her at these moments; for it was like the dancing mania of Eastern devotees, more than the ordinary light amusement of joyous youth, — a convulsion of the body and the mind, rather than a series of voluntary modulated motions.

Elsie rattled out the triple measure of a saraband. Her eyes began to glitter more brilliantly, and her shape to undulate in freer curves. Presently she noticed that Dick's look was fixed upon her necklace. His face betrayed his curiosity; he was intent on solving the question, why she always wore something about her neck. The chain of mosaics she had on at that moment displaced itself at every step, and he was peering with malignant, searching eagerness to see if an unsunned ring of fairer hue than the rest of the surface, or any less easily explained peculiarity, were hidden by her ornaments.

She stopped suddenly, caught the chain of mosaics and settled it hastily in its place, flung down her castanets, drew herself back, and stood

looking at him, with her head a little on one side, and her eyes narrowing in the way he had known so long and well.

"What is the matter, Cousin Elsie? What do you stop for?" he said.

Elsie did not answer, but kept her eyes on him, full of malicious light. The jealousy which lay covered up under his surface-thoughts took this opportunity to break out.

"You wouldn't act so, if you were dancing with Mr. Langdon, — would you, Elsie?" he asked.

It was with some effort that he looked steadily at her to see the effect of his question.

Elsie *colored*, — not much, but still perceptibly. Dick could not remember that he had ever seen her show this mark of emotion before, in all his experience of her fitful changes of mood. It had a singular depth of significance, therefore, for him; he knew how hardly her color came. Blushing means nothing, in some persons; in others, it betrays a profound inward agitation, — a perturbation of the feelings far more trying than the passions which with many easily moved persons break forth in tears. All who have observed much are aware that some men, who have seen a good deal of life in its less chastened aspects and are anything but modest, will blush often and easily, while there are delicate and sensitive women who can faint, or go into fits, if necessary, but are very rarely seen to betray their

feelings in their cheeks, even when their expression shows that their inmost soul is blushing scarlet.

Presently she answered, abruptly and scornfully, —

"Mr. Langdon is a gentleman, and would not vex me as you do."

"A gentleman!" Dick answered, with the most insulting accent, — "a gentleman! Come, Elsie, you've got the Dudley blood in your veins, and it doesn't do for you to call this poor, sneaking school-master a gentleman!"

He stopped short. Elsie's bosom was heaving, the faint flush on her cheek was becoming a vivid glow. Whether it were shame or wrath, he saw that he had reached some deep-lying centre of emotion. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. With another girl these signs of confusion might mean little or nothing; with her they were decisive and final. Elsie Venner loved Bernard Langdon.

The sudden conviction, absolute, overwhelming, which rushed upon him, had wellnigh led to an explosion of wrath, and perhaps some terrible scene which might have fulfilled some of Old Sophy's predictions. This, however, would never do. Dick's face whitened with his thoughts, but he kept still until he could speak calmly.

"I've nothing against the young fellow," he said; "only I don't think there's anything quite

good enough to keep the company of people that have the Dudley blood in them. You a'n't as proud as I am. I can't quite make up my mind to call a school-master a gentleman, though this one may be well enough. I've nothing against him, at any rate."

Elsie made no answer, but glided out of the room and slid away to her own apartment. She bolted the door and drew her curtains close. Then she threw herself on the floor, and fell into a dull, slow ache of passion, without tears, without words, almost without thoughts. So she remained, perhaps, for a half-hour, at the end of which time it seemed that her passion had become a sullen purpose. She arose, and, looking cautiously round, went to the hearth, which was ornamented with curious old Dutch tiles, with pictures of Scripture subjects. One of these represented the lifting of the brazen serpent. She took a hair-pin from one of her braids, and, insinuating its points under the edge of the tile, raised it from its place. A small leaden box lay under the tile, which she opened, and, taking from it a little white powder, which she folded in a scrap of paper, replaced the box and the tile over it.

Whether Dick had by any means got a knowledge of this proceeding, or whether he only suspected some unmentionable design on her part, there is no sufficient means of determining. At any rate, when they met, an hour or two after

these occurrences, he could not help noticing how easily she seemed to have got over her excitement. She was very pleasant with him, — too pleasant, Dick thought. It was not Elsie's way to come out of a fit of anger so easily as that. She had contrived some way of letting off her spite; that was certain. Dick was pretty cunning, as Old Sophy had said, and, whether or not he had any means of knowing Elsie's private intentions, watched her closely, and was on his guard against accidents.

For the first time, he took certain precautions with reference to his diet, such as were quite alien to his common habits. On coming to the dinner-table, that day, he complained of headache, took but little food, and refused the cup of coffee which Elsie offered him, saying that it did not agree with him when he had these attacks.

Here was a new complication. Obviously enough, he could not live in this way, suspecting everything but plain bread and water, and hardly feeling safe in meddling with them. Not only had this school-keeping wretch come between him and the scheme by which he was to secure his future fortune, but his image had so infected his cousin's mind that she was ready to try on him some of those tricks which, as he had heard hinted in the village, she had once before put in practice upon a person who had become odious to her.

Something must be done, and at once, to meet

the double necessities of this case. Every day, while the young girl was in these relations with the young man, was only making matters worse. They could exchange words and looks, they could arrange private interviews, they would be stooping together over the same book, her hair touching his cheek, her breath mingling with his, all the magnetic attractions drawing them together with strange, invisible effluences. As her passion for the school-master increased, her dislike to him, her cousin, would grow with it, and all his dangers would be multiplied. It was a fearful point he had reached. He was tempted at one moment to give up all his plans and to disappear suddenly from the place, leaving with the school-master, who had come between him and his object, an anonymous token of his personal sentiments which would be remembered a good while in the history of the town of Rockland. This was but a momentary thought; the great Dudley property could not be given up in that way.

Something must happen at once to break up all this order of things. He could think of but one Providential event adequate to the emergency, — an event foreshadowed by various recent circumstances, but hitherto floating in his mind only as a possibility. Its occurrence would at once change the course of Elsie's feelings, providing her with something to think of besides mischief, and remove the accursed obstacle which was thwarting all his own projects. Every pos-

sible motive, then, — his interest, his jealousy, his longing for revenge, and now his fears for his own safety, — urged him to regard the happening of a certain casualty as a matter of simple necessity. This was the self-destruction of Mr. Bernard Langdon.

Such an event, though it might be surprising to many people, would not be incredible, nor without many parallel cases. He was poor, a miserable fag, under the control of that mean wretch up there at the school, who looked as if he had sour buttermilk in his veins instead of blood. He was in love with a girl above his station, rich, and of old family, but strange in all her ways, and it was conceivable that he should become suddenly jealous of her. Or she might have frightened him with some display of her peculiarities which had filled him with a sudden repugnance in the place of love. Any of these things were credible, and would make a probable story enough, — so thought Dick over to himself with the New-England half of his mind.

Unfortunately, men will not always take themselves out of the way when, so far as their neighbors are concerned, it would be altogether the most appropriate and graceful and acceptable service they could render. There was at this particular moment no special reason for believing that the school-master meditated any violence to his own person. On the contrary, there was good evidence that he was taking some care of

himself. He was looking well and in good spirits, and in the habit of amusing himself and exercising, as if to keep up his standard of health, especially of taking certain evening-walks, before referred to, at an hour when most of the Rockland people had "retired," or, in vulgar language, "gone to b–d."

Dick Venner settled it, however, in his own mind, that Mr. Bernard Langdon must lay violent hands upon himself. He even went so far as to determine the precise hour, and the method in which the "rash act," as it would undoubtedly be called in the next issue of "The Rockland Weekly Universe," should be committed. Time,—*this evening*. Method,—asphyxia, by suspension. It was, unquestionably, taking a great liberty with a man to decide that he should become *felo de se* without his own consent. Such, however, was the decision of Mr. Richard Venner with regard to Mr. Bernard Langdon.

If everything went right, then, there would be a coroner's inquest to-morrow upon what remained of that gentleman, found suspended to the branch of a tree somewhere within a mile of the Apollinean Institute. The "Weekly Universe" would have a startling paragraph announcing a "SAD EVENT!!!" which had "thrown the town into an intense state of excitement. Mr. Barnard Langden, a well known teacher at the Appolinian Institute, was found, etc., etc. The vital spark was extinct. The motive to the rash act can only

be conjectured, but is supposed to be disapointed affection. The name of an accomplished young lady of *the highest respectability* and great beauty is mentioned in connection with this melencholy occurence."

Dick Venner was at the tea-table that evening, as usual. — No, he would take green tea, if she pleased, — the same that her father drank. It would suit his headache better. — Nothing, — he was much obliged to her. He would help himself, — which he did in a little different way from common, naturally enough, on account of his headache. He noticed that Elsie seemed a little nervous while she was rinsing some of the teacups before their removal.

"There's something going on in that witch's head," he said to himself. "I know her, — she'd be savage now, if she hadn't got some trick in hand. Let's see how she looks to-morrow!"

Dick announced that he should go to bed early that evening, on account of this confounded headache which had been troubling him so much. In fact, he went up early, and locked his door after him, with as much noise as he could make. He then changed some part of his dress, so that it should be dark throughout, slipped off his boots, drew the lasso out from the bottom of the contents of his trunk, and, carrying that and his boots in his hand, opened his door softly, locked it after him, and stole down the back-stairs, so as to get out of the house unnoticed. He went straight to

the stable and saddled the mustang. He took a rope from the stable with him, mounted his horse, and set forth in the direction of the Institute.

Mr. Bernard, as we have seen, had not been very profoundly impressed by the old Doctor's cautions, — enough, however, to follow out some of his hints which were not troublesome to attend to. He laughed at the idea of carrying a loaded pistol about with him; but still it seemed only fair, as the old Doctor thought so much of the matter, to humor him about it. As for not going about when and where he liked, for fear he might have some lurking enemy, that was a thing not to be listened to nor thought of. There was nothing to be ashamed of or troubled about in any of his relations with the school-girls. Elsie, no doubt, showed a kind of attraction towards him, as did perhaps some others; but he had been perfectly discreet, and no father or brother or lover had any just cause of quarrel with him. To be sure, that dark young man at the Dudley mansion-house looked as if he were his enemy, when he had met him; but certainly there was nothing in their relations to each other, or in his own to Elsie, that would be like to stir such malice in his mind as would lead him to play any of his wild Southern tricks at his, Mr. Bernard's, expense. Yet he had a vague feeling that this young man was dangerous, and he had been given to understand that one of the risks he ran was from that quarter.

On this particular evening, he had a strange, unusual sense of some impending peril. His recent interview with the Doctor, certain remarks which had been dropped in his hearing, but above all an unaccountable impression upon his spirits, all combined to fill his mind with a foreboding conviction that he was very near some overshadowing danger. It was as the chill of the ice-mountain toward which the ship is steering under full sail. He felt a strong impulse to see Helen Darley and talk with her. She was in the common parlor, and, fortunately, alone.

"Helen," he said, — for they were almost like brother and sister now, — "I have been thinking what you would do, if I should have to leave the school at short notice, or be taken away suddenly by any accident."

"Do?" she said, her cheek growing paler than its natural delicate hue, — "why, I do not know how I could possibly consent to live here, if you left us. Since you came, my life has been almost easy; before, it was getting intolerable. You must not talk about going, my dear friend; you have spoiled me for my place. Who is there here that I can have any true society with, but you? You would not leave us for another school, would you?"

"No, no, my dear Helen," Mr. Bernard said; "if it depends on myself, I shall stay out my full time, and enjoy your company and friendship. But everything is uncertain in this world;

I have been thinking that I might be wanted elsewhere, and called when I did not think of it; — it was a fancy, perhaps, — but I can't keep it out of my mind this evening. If any of my fancies should come true, Helen, there are two or three messages I want to leave with you. I have marked a book or two with a cross in pencil on the fly-leaf; — these are for you. There is a little hymn-book I should like to have you give to Elsie from me; — it may be a kind of comfort to the poor girl."

Helen's eyes glistened as she interrupted him, —

"What do you mean? You must not talk so, Mr. Langdon. Why, you never looked better in your life. Tell me now, you are not in earnest, are you, but only trying a little sentiment on me?"

Mr. Bernard smiled, but rather sadly.

"About half in earnest," he said. "I have had some fancies in my head, — superstitions, I suppose, — at any rate, it does no harm to tell you what I should like to have done, if anything should happen, — very likely nothing ever will. Send the rest of the books home, if you please, and write a letter to my mother. And, Helen, you will find one small volume in my desk enveloped and directed, you will see to whom; — give this with your own hands; it is a keepsake."

The tears gathered in her eyes; she could not speak at first. Presently, —

"Why, Bernard, my dear friend, my brother, it cannot be that you are in danger? Tell me what it is, and, if I can share it with you, or counsel you in any way, it will only be paying back the great debt I owe you. No, no, — it can't be true, — you are tired and worried, and your spirits have got depressed. I know what that is; — I was sure, one winter, that I should die before spring; but I lived to see the dandelions and buttercups go to seed. Come, tell me it was nothing but your imagination."

She felt a tear upon her cheek, but would not turn her face away from him; it was the tear of a sister.

"I am really in earnest, Helen," he said. "I don't know that there is the least reason in the world for these fancies. If they all go off and nothing comes of them, you may laugh at me, if you like. But if there should be any occasion, remember my requests. You don't believe in presentiments, do you?"

"Oh, don't ask me, I beg you," Helen answered. "I have had a good many frights for every one real misfortune I have suffered. Sometimes I have thought I was warned beforehand of coming trouble, just as many people are of changes in the weather, by some unaccountable feeling, — but not often, and I don't like to talk about such things. I wouldn't think about these fancies of yours. I don't believe you have exercised enough; — don't you think it's con-

finement in the school has made you nervous?"

"Perhaps it has; but it happens that I have thought more of exercise lately, and have taken regular evening walks, besides playing my old gymnastic tricks every day."

They talked on many subjects, but through all he said Helen perceived a pervading tone of sadness, and an expression as of a dreamy foreboding of unknown evil. They parted at the usual hour, and went to their several rooms. The sadness of Mr. Bernard had sunk into the heart of Helen, and she mingled many tears with her prayers that evening, earnestly entreating that he might be comforted in his days of trial and protected in his hour of danger.

Mr. Bernard stayed in his room a short time before setting out for his evening walk. His eye fell upon the Bible his mother had given him when he left home, and he opened it in the New Testament at a venture. It happened that the first words he read were these, — "*Lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.*" In the state of mind in which he was at the moment, the text startled him. It was like a supernatural warning. He was not going to expose himself to any particular danger this evening; a walk in a quiet village was as free from risk as Helen Darley or his own mother could ask; yet he had an unaccountable feeling of apprehension, without any definite object. At this moment he remembered

the old Doctor's counsel, which he had sometimes neglected, and, blushing at the feeling which led him to do it, he took the pistol his suspicious old friend had forced upon him, which he had put away loaded, and, thrusting it into his pocket, set out upon his walk.

The moon was shining at intervals, for the night was partially clouded. There seemed to be nobody stirring, though his attention was unusually awake, and he could hear the whirr of the bats overhead, and the pulsating croak of the frogs in the distant pools and marshes. Presently he detected the sound of hoofs at some distance, and, looking forward, saw a horseman coming in his direction. The moon was under a cloud at the moment, and he could only observe that the horse and his rider looked like a single dark object, and that they were moving along at an easy pace. Mr. Bernard was really ashamed of himself, when he found his hand on the butt of his pistol. When the horseman was within a hundred and fifty yards of him, the moon shone out suddenly and revealed each of them to the other. The rider paused for a moment, as if carefully surveying the pedestrian, then suddenly put his horse to the full gallop, and dashed towards him, rising at the same instant in his stirrups and swinging something round his head, — what, Mr. Bernard could not make out. It was a strange manœuvre, — so strange and threatening in aspect that the young man forgot his nervousness

in an instant, cocked his pistol, and waited to see what mischief all this meant. He did not wait long. As the rider came rushing towards him, he made a rapid motion and something leaped five-and-twenty feet through the air, in Mr. Bernard's direction. In an instant he felt a ring, as of a rope or thong, settle upon his shoulders. There was no time to think, — he would be lost in another second. He raised his pistol and fired, — not at the rider, but at the horse. His aim was true; the mustang gave one bound and fell lifeless, shot through the head. The lasso was fastened to his saddle, and his last bound threw Mr. Bernard violently to the earth, where he lay motionless, as if stunned.

In the mean time, Dick Venner, who had been dashed down with his horse, was trying to extricate himself, — one of his legs being held fast under the animal, the long spur on his boot having caught in the saddle-cloth. He found, however, that he could do nothing with his right arm, his shoulder having been in some way injured in his fall. But his Southern blood was up, and, as he saw Mr. Bernard move as if he were coming to his senses, he struggled violently to free himself.

"I'll have the dog, yet," he said, — "only let me get at him with the knife!"

He had just succeeded in extricating his imprisoned leg, and was ready to spring to his feet, when he was caught firmly by the throat, and,

looking up, saw a clumsy barbed weapon, commonly known as a hay-fork, within an inch of his breast.

"Hold on there! What 'n thunder 'r' y' abaout, y' darned Portagee?" said a voice, with a decided nasal tone in it, but sharp and resolute.

Dick looked from the weapon to the person who held it, and saw a sturdy, plain man standing over him, with his teeth clinched, and his aspect that of one all ready for mischief.

"Lay still, naow!" said Abel Stebbins, the Doctor's man; "'f y' don't, I'll stick ye, 'z sure 'z y' 'r' alive! I been aäfter ye f'r a week, 'n' I got y' naow! I knowed I'd ketch ye at some darned trick or 'nother 'fore I'd done 'ith ye!"

Dick lay perfectly still, feeling that he was crippled and helpless, thinking all the time with the Yankee half of his mind what to do about it. He saw Mr. Bernard lift his head and look around him. He would get his senses again in a few minutes, very probably, and then he, Mr. Richard Venner, would be done for.

"Let me up! let me up!" he cried, in a low, hurried voice, — "I'll give you a hundred dollars in gold to let me go. The man a'n't hurt, — don't you see him stirring? He'll come to himself in two minutes. Let me up! I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars in gold, now, here on the spot, — and the watch out of my pocket; take it yourself, with your own hands!"

"I'll see y' darned fust! Ketch me lett'n' go!" was Abel's emphatic answer. "Yeou lay still, 'n' wait t'll that man comes tew."

He kept the hay-fork ready for action at the slightest sign of resistance.

Mr. Bernard, in the mean time, had been getting, first his senses, and then some few of his scattered wits, a little together.

"What is it?" — he said. "Who's hurt? What's happened?"

"Come along here 'z quick 'z y' ken," Abel answered, "'n' haälp me fix this fellah. Y' been hurt, y'rself, 'n' the' 's murder come pooty nigh happenin'."

Mr. Bernard heard the answer, but presently stared about and asked again, "*Who's hurt? What's happened?*"

"Y' 'r' hurt, y'rself, I tell ye," said Abel; "'n' the' 's been a murder, pooty nigh."

Mr. Bernard felt something about his neck, and, putting his hands up, found the loop of the lasso, which he loosened, but did not think to slip over his head, in the confusion of his perceptions and thoughts. It was a wonder that it had not choked him, but he had fallen forward so as to slacken it.

By this time he was getting some notion of what he was about, and presently began looking round for his pistol, which had fallen. He found it lying near him, cocked it mechanically, and walked, somewhat unsteadily, towards the two

men, who were keeping their position as still as if they were performing in a *tableau.*

"Quick, naow!" said Abel, who had heard the click of cocking the pistol, and saw that he held it in his hand, as he came towards him. "Gi' me that pistil, and yeou fetch that 'ere rope layin' there. I'll have this here fellah fixed 'n less 'n two minutes."

Mr. Bernard did as Abel said, — stupidly and mechanically, for he was but half right as yet. Abel pointed the pistol at Dick's head.

"Naow hold up y'r hands, yeou fellah," he said, "'n' keep 'em up, while this man puts the rope raound y'r wrists."

Dick felt himself helpless, and, rather than have his disabled arm roughly dealt with, held up his hands. Mr. Bernard did as Abel said; he was in a purely passive state, and obeyed orders like a child. Abel then secured the rope in a most thorough and satisfactory complication of twists and knots.

"Naow get up, will ye?" he said; and the unfortunate Dick rose to his feet.

"*Who's hurt? What's happened?*" asked poor Mr. Bernard again, his memory having been completely jarred out of him for the time.

"Come, look here naow, yeou, don' stan' aäskin' questions over 'n' over; — 't beats all! ha'n't I tol' y' a dozen times?"

As Abel spoke, he turned and looked at Mr. Bernard.

"Hullo! What 'n thunder's that 'ere raoun' y'r neck? Ketched ye 'ith a slippernoose, hey? Wal, if that a'n't the craowner! Hol' on a minute, Cap'n, 'n' I'll show ye what that 'ere halter's good for."

Abel slipped the noose over Mr. Bernard's head, and put it round the neck of the miserable Dick Venner, who made no sign of resistance, — whether on account of the pain he was in, or from mere helplessness, or because he was waiting for some unguarded moment to escape, — since resistance seemed of no use.

"I'm go'n' to kerry y' home," said Abel; "th' ol' Doctor, he's got a gre't cur'osity t' see ye. Jes' step along naow, — off that way, will ye? — 'n' I'll hol' on t' th' bridle, f' fear y' sh'd run away."

He took hold of the leather thong, but found that it was fastened at the other end to the saddle. This was too much for Abel.

"Wal, naow, yeou *be* a pooty chap to hev raound! A fellah's neck in a slippernoose at one eend of a halter, 'n' a hoss on th' full spring at t'other eend!"

He looked at him from head to foot as a naturalist inspects a new specimen. His clothes had suffered in his fall, especially on the leg which had been caught under the horse.

"Hullo! look o' there, naow! What's that 'ere stickin' aout o' y'r boot?"

It was nothing but the handle of an ugly knife, which Abel instantly relieved him of.

The party now took up the line of march for old Doctor Kittredge's house, Abel carrying the pistol and knife, and Mr. Bernard walking in silence, still half-stunned, holding the hay-fork, which Abel had thrust into his hand. It was all a dream to him as yet. He remembered the horseman riding at him, and his firing the pistol; but whether he was alive, and these walls around him belonged to the village of Rockland, or whether he had passed the dark river, and was in a suburb of the New Jerusalem, he could not as yet have told.

They were in the street where the Doctor's house was situated.

"I guess I'll fire off one o' these here berrils," said Abel.

He fired.

Presently there was a noise of opening windows, and the nocturnal head-dresses of Rockland flowered out of them like so many developments of the Night-blooming Cereus. White cotton caps and red bandanna handkerchiefs were the prevailing forms of efflorescence. The main point was that the village was waked up. The old Doctor always waked easily, from long habit, and was the first among those who looked out to see what had happened.

"Why, Abel!" he called out, "what have you got there? and what's all this noise about?"

"We've ketched the Portagee!" Abel answered, as laconically as the hero of Lake Erie

in his famous dispatch. "Go in there, you fellah!"

The prisoner was marched into the house, and the Doctor, who had bewitched his clothes upon him in a way that would have been miraculous in anybody but a physician, was down in presentable form as soon as if it had been a child in a fit that he was sent for.

"Richard Venner!" the Doctor exclaimed. "What is the meaning of all this? Mr. Langdon, has anything happened to you?"

Mr. Bernard put his hand to his head.

"My mind is confused," he said. "I've had a fall. — Oh, yes! — wait a minute and it will all come back to me."

"Sit down, sit down," the doctor said. "Abel will tell me about it. Slight concussion of the brain. Can't remember very well for an hour or two, — will come right by to-morrow."

"Been stunded," Abel said. "He can't tell nothin'."

Abel then proceeded to give a Napoleonic bulletin of the recent combat of cavalry and infantry and its results, — none slain, one captured.

The Doctor looked at the prisoner through his spectacles.

"What's the matter with your shoulder, Venner?"

Dick answered sullenly, that he didn't know, — fell on it when his horse came down. The Doc-

tor examined it as carefully as he could through his clothes.

"Out of joint. Untie his hands, Abel."

By this time a small alarm had spread among the neighbors, and there was a circle around Dick, who glared about on the assembled honest people like a hawk with a broken wing.

When the Doctor said, "Untie his hands," the circle widened perceptibly.

"Isn't it a leetle rash to give him the use of his hands? I see there's females and children standin' near."

This was the remark of our old friend, Deacon Soper, who retired from the front row, as he spoke, behind a respectable-looking, but somewhat hastily dressed person of the defenceless sex, the female help of a neighboring household, accompanied by a boy, whose unsmoothed shock of hair looked like a last-year's crow's-nest.

But Abel untied his hands, in spite of the Deacon's considerate remonstrance.

"Now," said the Doctor, "the first thing is to put the joint back."

"Stop," said Deacon Soper, — "stop a minute. Don't you think it will be safer — for the women-folks — jest to wait till mornin', afore you put that j'int into the socket?"

Colonel Sprowle, who had been called by a special messenger, spoke up at this moment.

"Let the women-folks and the deacons go home, if they're scared, and put the fellah's j'int

in as quick as you like. I'll resk him, j'int in or out."

"I want one of you to go straight down to Dudley Venner's with a message," the Doctor said. "I will have the young man's shoulder in quick enough."

"Don't send that message!" said Dick, in a hoarse voice; — "do what you like with my arm, but don't send that message! Let me go, — I can walk, and I'll be off from this place. There's nobody hurt but myself. Damn the shoulder! — let me go! You shall never hear of me again!"

Mr. Bernard came forward.

"My friends," he said, "*I* am not injured, — seriously, at least. Nobody need complain against this man, if I don't. The Doctor will treat him like a human being, at any rate; and then, if he will go, let him. There are too many witnesses against him here for him to want to stay."

The Doctor, in the mean time, without saying a word to all this, had got a towel round the shoulder and chest and another round the arm, and had the bone replaced in a very few minutes.

"Abel, put Cassia into the new chaise," he said, quietly. "My friends and neighbors, leave this young man to me."

"Colonel Sprowle, you're a justice of the peace," said Deacon Soper, "and you know what the law says in cases like this. I a'n't

so clear that it won't have to come afore the Grand Jury, whether we will or no."

"I guess we'll set that j'int to-morrow mornin'," said Colonel Sprowle, — which made a laugh at the Deacon's expense, and virtually settled the question.

"Now trust this young man in my care," said the old Doctor, "and go home and finish your naps. I knew him when he was a boy and I'll answer for it, he won't trouble you any more. The Dudley blood makes folks proud, I can tell you, whatever else they are."

The good people so respected and believed in the Doctor that they left the prisoner with him.

Presently, Cassia, the fast Morgan mare, came up to the front-door, with the wheels of the new, light chaise flashing behind her in the moonlight. The Doctor drove Dick forty miles at a stretch that night, out of the limits of the State.

"Do you want money?" he said, before he left him.

Dick told him the secret of his golden belt.

"Where shall I send your trunk after you from your uncle's?"

Dick gave him a direction to a seaport town to which he himself was going, to take passage for a port in South America.

"Good-bye, Richard," said the Doctor. "Try to learn something from to-night's lesson."

The Southern impulses in Dick's wild blood overcame him, and he kissed the old Doctor on

both cheeks, crying as only the children of the sun can cry, after the first hours in the dewy morning of life. So Dick Venner disappears from this story. An hour after dawn, Cassia pointed her fine ears homeward, and struck into her square, honest trot, as if she had not been doing anything more than her duty during her four hours' stretch of the last night.

Abel was not in the habit of questioning the Doctor's decisions.

"It's all right," he said to Mr. Bernard. "The fellah's Squire Venner's relation, anyhaow. Don't you want to wait here, jest a little while, till I come back? The' 's a consid'able nice saddle 'n' bridle on a dead hoss that's layin' daown there in the road 'n' I guess the' a'n't no use in lettin' on 'em spile, — so I'll jest step aout 'n' fetch 'em along. I kind o' calc'late 't won't pay to take the cretur's shoes 'n' hide off to-night, — 'n' the' won't be much iron on that hoss's huffs an haour after daylight, I'll bate ye a quarter."

"I'll walk along with you," said Mr. Bernard; — "I feel as if I could get along well enough now."

So they set off together. There was a little crowd round the dead mustang already, principally consisting of neighbors who had adjourned from the Doctor's house to see the scene of the late adventure. In addition to these, however, the assembly was honored by the presence of Mr. Principal Silas Peckham, who had been called

from his slumbers by a message that Master Langdon was shot through the head by a highway-robber, but had learned a true version of the story by this time. His voice was at that moment heard above the rest, — sharp, but thin, like bad cider-vinegar.

"I take charge of that property, I say. Master Langdon's actin' under my orders, and I claim that hoss and all that's on him. Hiram! jest slip off that saddle and bridle, and carry 'em up to the Institoot, and bring down a pair of pinchers and a file, — and — stop — fetch a pair of shears, too; there's hoss-hair enough in that mane and tail to stuff a bolster with."

"You let that hoss alone!" spoke up Colonel Sprowle. "When a fellah goes out huntin' and shoots a squirrel, do you think he's go'n' to let another fellah pick him up and kerry him off? Not if he's got a double-berril gun, and t'other berril ha'n't been fired off yet! I should like to see the mahn that'll take off that seddle 'n' bridle, excep' the one th't hez a fair right to the whole concern!"

Hiram was from one of the lean streaks in New Hampshire, and, not being overfed in Mr. Silas Peckham's kitchen, was somewhat wanting in stamina, as well as in stomach, for so doubtful an enterprise as undertaking to carry out his employer's orders in the face of the Colonel's defiance.

Just then Mr. Bernard and Abel came up together.

"Here they be," said the Colonel. "Stan' beck, gentlemen!"

Mr. Bernard, who was pale and still a little confused, but gradually becoming more like himself, stood and looked in silence for a moment.

All his thoughts seemed to be clearing themselves in this interval. He took in the whole series of incidents: his own frightful risk; the strange, instinctive, nay, Providential impulse which had led him so suddenly to do the one only thing which could possibly have saved him; the sudden appearance of the Doctor's man, but for which he might yet have been lost; and the discomfiture and capture of his dangerous enemy.

It was all past now, and a feeling of pity rose in Mr. Bernard's heart.

"He loved that horse, no doubt," he said, — "and no wonder. A beautiful, wild-looking creature! Take off those things that are on him, Abel, and have them carried to Mr. Dudley Venner's. If he does not want them, you may keep them yourself, for all that I have to say. One thing more. I hope nobody will lift his hand against this noble creature to mutilate him in any way. After you have taken off the saddle and bridle, Abel, bury him just as he is. Under that old beech-tree will be a good place. You'll see to it, — won't you, Abel?"

Abel nodded assent, and Mr. Bernard returned to the Institute, threw himself in his clothes on the bed, and slept like one who is heavy with wine.

Following Mr. Bernard's wishes, Abel at once took off the high-peaked saddle and the richly ornamented bridle from the mustang. Then, with the aid of two or three others, he removed him to the place indicated. Spades and shovels were soon procured, and before the moon had set, the wild horse of the Pampas was at rest under the turf at the way-side, in the far village among the hills of New England.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NEWS REACHES THE DUDLEY MANSION.

Early the next morning Abel Stebbins made his appearance at Dudley Venner's, and requested to see the maän o' the haouse abaout somethin' o' consequence. Mr. Venner sent word that the messenger should wait below, and presently appeared in the study, where Abel was making himself at home, as is the wont of the republican citizen, when he hides the purple of empire beneath the apron of domestic service.

"Good mornin', Squire!" said Abel, as Mr. Venner entered. "My name's Stebbins, 'n' I'm stoppin' f'r a spell 'ith ol' Doctor Kittredge."

"Well, Stebbins," said Mr. Dudley Venner, "have you brought any special message from the Doctor?"

"Y' ha'n't heerd nothin' abaout it, Squire, d' ye mean t' say?" said Abel,— beginning to suspect that he was the first to bring the news of last evening's events.

"About what?" asked Mr. Venner, with some interest.

"Dew tell, naow! Waäl, that beats all! Why,

that 'ere Portagee relation o' yourn 'z been tryin' t' ketch a fellah 'n a slippernoose, 'n' got ketched himself, — that's all. Y' ha'n't heerd noth'n' abaout it?"

"Sit down," said Mr. Dudley Venner, calmly, "and tell me all you have to say."

So Abel sat down and gave him an account of the events of the last evening. It was a strange and terrible surprise to Dudley Venner to find that his nephew, who had been an inmate of his house and the companion of his daughter, was to all intents and purposes guilty of the gravest of crimes. But the first shock was no sooner over than he began to think what effect the news would have on Elsie. He imagined that there was a kind of friendly feeling between them, and he feared some crisis would be provoked in his daughter's mental condition by the discovery. He would wait, however, until she came from her chamber, before disturbing her with the evil tidings.

Abel did not forget his message with reference to the equipments of the dead mustang.

"The' was some things on the hoss, Squire, that the man he ketched said he didn' care no gre't abaout; but perhaps you'd like to have 'em fetched to the mansion-haouse. Ef y' *didn'* care abaout 'em, though, I shouldn' min' keepin' on 'em; they might come handy some time or 'nother: they say, holt on t' anything for ten year 'n' there'll be some kin' o' use for 't."

"Keep everything," said Dudley Venner. "I don't want to see anything belonging to that young man."

So Abel nodded to Mr. Venner, and left the study to find some of the men about the stable to tell and talk over with them the events of the last evening. He presently came upon Elbridge, chief of the equine department, and driver of the family-coach.

"Good mornin', Abe," said Elbridge. "What's fetched y' daown here so all-fired airly?"

"You're a darned pooty lot daown here, you be!" Abel answered. "Better keep your Portagees t' home nex' time, ketchin' folks 'ith slipper-nooses raoun' their necks, 'n' kerryin' knives 'n their boots!"

"What 'r' you jawin' abaout?" Elbridge said, looking up to see if he was in earnest, and what he meant.

"*Jawin'* abaout? You'll find aout 'z soon 'z y' go into that 'ere stable o' yourn! Y' won't curry that 'ere long-tailed black hoss no more; 'n' y' won't set y'r eyes on the fellah that rid him, ag'in, in a hurry!"

Elbridge walked straight to the stable, without saying a word, found the door unlocked, and went in.

"Th' critter's gone, sure enough!" he said. "Glad on 't! The darndest, kickin'est, bitin'est beast th't ever I see, 'r ever wan' t' see ag'in! Good reddance! Don' wan' no snappin'-turkles

in my stable! Whar's the man gone th't brought the critter?"

"Whar he 's gone? Guess y' better go 'n' aäsk my ol' man; he kerried him off laäs' night; 'n' when he comes back, mebbe he'll tell ye whar he's gone tew!"

By this time Elbridge had found out that Abel was in earnest, and had something to tell. He looked at the litter in the mustang's stall, then at the crib.

"Ha'n't ēat b't haälf his feed. Ha'n't been daown on his straw. Must ha' been took aout somewhere abaout ten 'r 'leven o'clock. I know that 'ere critter's ways. The fellah's had him aout nights afore; b't I never thought nothin' o' no mischief. He's a kin' o' haälf Injin. What is 't the chap 's been a-doin' on? Tell 's all abaout it."

Abel sat down on a meal-chest, picked up a straw and put it into his mouth. Elbridge sat down at the other end, pulled out his jack-knife, opened the penknife-blade, and began sticking it into the lid of the meal-chest. The Doctor's man had a story to tell, and he meant to get all the enjoyment out of it. So he told it with every luxury of circumstance. Mr. Venner's man heard it all with open mouth. No listener in the gardens of Stamboul could have found more rapture in a tale heard amidst the perfume of roses and the voices of birds and tinkling of fountains than Elbridge in following Abel's narrative, as they

sat there in the aromatic ammoniacal atmosphere of the stable, the grinding of the horses' jaws keeping evenly on through it all, with now and then the interruption of a stamping hoof, and at intervals a ringing crow from the barn-yard.

Elbridge stopped a minute to think, after Abel had finished.

"Who's took care o' them things that was on the hoss?" he said, gravely.

"Waäl, Langden, he seemed to kin' o' think I'd ought to have 'em, — 'n' the Squire, he didn' seem to have no 'bjection; 'n' so, — waäl, I calc'late I sh'll jes' holt on to 'em myself; they a'n't good f'r much, but they're cur'ous t' keep t' look at."

Mr. Venner's man did not appear much gratified by this arrangement, especially as he had a shrewd suspicion that some of the ornaments of the bridle were of precious metal, having made occasional examinations of them with the edge of a file. But he did not see exactly what to do about it, except to get them from Abel in the way of bargain.

"Waäl, no, — they *a'n't* good for much 'xcep' to look at. 'F y' ever rid on that seddle once, y' wouldn' try it ag'in, very spry, — not 'f y' c'd haälp y'rsaälf. I tried it, — darned 'f I sot daown f'r th' nex' week, — ēat all my victuals stan'in'. I sh'd like t' hev them things wal enough to heng up 'n the stable; 'f y' want t' trade some day, fetch 'em along daown."

Abel rather expected that Elbridge would have laid claim to the saddle and bridle on the strength of some promise or other presumptive title, and thought himself lucky to get off with only offering to think abaout tradin'.

When Elbridge returned to the house, he found the family in a state of great excitement. Mr. Venner had told Old Sophy, and she had informed the other servants. Everybody knew what had happened, excepting Elsie. Her father had charged them all to say nothing about it to her; he would tell her, when she came down.

He heard her step at last, — a light, gliding step, — so light that her coming was often unheard, except by those who perceived the faint rustle that went with it. She was paler than common this morning, as she came into her father's study.

After a few words of salutation, he said quietly, —

"Elsie, my dear, your cousin Richard has left us."

She grew still paler, as she asked, —

"*Is he dead?*"

Dudley Venner started to see the expression with which Elsie put this question.

"He is living, — but dead to us from this day forward," said her father.

He proceeded to tell her, in a general way, the story he had just heard from Abel. There could be no doubting it; — he remembered him as the

Doctor's man; and as Abel had seen all with his own eyes, — as Dick's chamber, when unlocked with a spare key, was found empty, and his bed had not been slept in, he accepted the whole account as true.

When he told of Dick's attempt on the young school-master, (" You know Mr. Langdon very well, Elsie, — a perfectly inoffensive young man, as I understand,") Elsie turned her face away and slid along by the wall to the window which looked out on the little grass-plot with the white stone standing in it. Her father could not see her face, but he knew by her movements that her dangerous mood was on her. When she heard the sequel of the story, the discomfiture and capture of Dick, she turned round for an instant, with a look of contempt and of something like triumph upon her face. Her father saw that her cousin had become odious to her. He knew well, by every change of her countenance, by her movements, by every varying curve of her graceful figure, the transitions from passion to repose, from fierce excitement to the dull languor which often succeeded her threatening paroxysms.

She remained looking out at the window. A group of white fan-tailed pigeons had lighted on the green plot before it and clustered about one of their companions who lay on his back, fluttering in a strange way, with outspread wings and twitching feet. Elsie uttered a faint cry; these were her special favorites, and often fed from her

hand. She threw open the long window, sprang out, caught up the white fan-tail, and held it to her bosom. The bird stretched himself out, and then lay still, with open eyes, lifeless. She looked at him a moment, and, sliding in through the open window and through the study, sought her own apartment, where she locked herself in, and began to sob and moan like those that weep. But the gracious solace of tears seemed to be denied her, and her grief, like her anger, was a dull ache, longing, like that, to finish itself with a fierce paroxysm, but wanting its natural outlet.

This seemingly trifling incident of the death of her favorite appeared to change all the current of her thought. Whether it were the sight of the dying bird, or the thought that her own agency might have been concerned in it, or some deeper grief, which took this occasion to declare itself, — some dark remorse or hopeless longing, — whatever it might be, there was an unwonted tumult in her soul. To whom should she go in her vague misery? Only to Him who knows all His creatures' sorrows, and listens to the faintest human cry. She knelt, as she had been taught to kneel from her childhood, and tried to pray. But her thoughts refused to flow in the language of supplication. She could not plead for herself as other women plead in their hours of anguish. She rose like one who should stoop to drink, and find dust in the place of water. Partly from restlessness, partly from an attraction she hardly

avowed to herself, she followed her usual habit and strolled listlessly along to the school.

Of course everybody at the Institute was full of the terrible adventure of the preceding evening. Mr. Bernard felt poorly enough; but he had made it a point to show himself the next morning, as if nothing had happened. Helen Darley knew nothing of it all until she had risen, when the gossipy matron of the establishment made her acquainted with all its details, embellished with such additional ornamental appendages as it had caught up in transmission from lip to lip. She did not love to betray her sensibilities, but she was pale and tremulous and very nearly tearful when Mr. Bernard entered the sitting-room, showing on his features traces of the violent shock he had received and the heavy slumber from which he had risen with throbbing brows. What the poor girl's impulse was, on seeing him, we need not inquire too curiously. If he had been her own brother, she would have kissed him and cried on his neck; but something held her back. There is no galvanism in kiss-your-brother; it is copper against copper: but alien bloods develop strange currents, when they flow close to each other, with only the films that cover lip and cheek between them. Mr. Bernard, as some of us may remember, violated the proprieties and laid himself open to reproach by his enterprise with a bouncing village-girl, to whose

rosy cheek an honest smack was not probably an absolute novelty. He made it all up by his discretion and good behavior now. He saw by Helen's moist eye and trembling lip that her woman's heart was off its guard, and he knew, by the infallible instinct of sex, that he should be forgiven, if he thanked her for her sisterly sympathies in the most natural way, — expressive, and at the same time economical of breath and utterance. He would not give a false look to their friendship by any such demonstration. Helen was a little older than himself, but the aureole of young womanhood had not yet begun to fade from around her. She was surrounded by that enchanted atmosphere into which the girl walks with dreamy eyes, and out of which the woman passes with a story written on her forehead. Some people think very little of these refinements; they have not studied magnetism and the law of the square of the distance.

So Mr. Bernard thanked Helen for her interest without the aid of the twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet, — the love labial, — the limping consonant which it takes two to speak plain. Indeed, he scarcely let her say a word, at first; for he saw that it was hard for her to conceal her emotion. No wonder; he had come within a hair's-breadth of losing his life, and he had been a very kind friend and a very dear companion to her.

There were some curious spiritual experiences connected with his last evening's adventure,

which were working very strongly in his mind. It was borne in upon him irresistibly that he had been *dead* since he had seen Helen, — as dead as the son of the Widow of Nain before the bier was touched and he sat up and began to speak. There was an interval between two conscious moments which appeared to him like a temporary annihilation, and the thoughts it suggested were worrying him with strange perplexities.

He remembered seeing the dark figure on horseback rise in the saddle and something leap from its hand. He remembered the thrill he felt as the coil settled on his shoulders, and the sudden impulse which led him to fire as he did. With the report of the pistol all became blank, until he found himself in a strange, bewildered state, groping about for the weapon, which he had a vague consciousness of having dropped. But, according to Abel's account, there must have been an interval of some minutes between these recollections, and he could not help asking, Where was the mind, the soul, the thinking principle, all this time?

A man is stunned by a blow with a stick on the head. He becomes unconscious. Another man gets a harder blow on the head from a bigger stick, and it kills him. Does he become unconscious, too? If so, *when does he come to his consciousness?* The man who has had a slight or moderate blow comes to himself when

the immediate shock passes off and the organs begin to work again, or when a bit of the skull is pried up, if that happens to be broken. Suppose the blow is hard enough to spoil the brain and stop the play of the organs, what happens then?

A British captain was struck by a cannon-ball on the head, just as he was giving an order, at the Battle of the Nile. Fifteen months afterwards he was trephined at Greenwich Hospital, having been insensible all that time. Immediately after the operation his consciousness returned, and he at once began carrying out the order he was giving when the shot struck him. Suppose he had never been trephined, when would his consciousness have returned? When his breath ceased and his heart stopped beating?

When Mr. Bernard said to Helen, "I have been dead since I saw you," it startled her not a little; for his expression was that of perfect good faith, and she feared that his mind was disordered. When he explained, not as has been done just now, at length, but in a hurried, imperfect way, the meaning of his strange assertion, and the fearful Sadduceeisms which it had suggested to his mind, she looked troubled at first, and then thoughtful. She did not feel able to answer all the difficulties he raised, but she met them with that faith which is the strength as well as the weakness of women, — which makes them

weak in the hands of man, but strong in the presence of the Unseen.

"It is a strange experience," she said; "but I once had something like it. I fainted, and lost some five or ten minutes out of my life, as much as if I had been dead. But when I came to myself, I was the same person every way, in my recollections and character. So I suppose that loss of consciousness is not death. And if I was born out of unconsciousness into infancy with many *family*-traits of mind and body, I can believe, from my own reason, even without help from Revelation, that I shall be born again out of the unconsciousness of death with my *individual* traits of mind and body. If death is, as it should seem to be, a loss of consciousness, that does not shake my faith; for I have been put into a body once already to fit me for living here, and I hope to be in some way fitted after this life to enjoy a better one. But it is all trust in God and in his Word. These are enough for me; I hope they are for you."

Helen was a minister's daughter, and familiar from her childhood with this class of questions, especially with all the doubts and perplexities which are sure to assail every thinking child bred in any inorganic or not thoroughly vitalized faith, — as is too often the case with the children of professional theologians. The kind of discipline they are subjected to is like that of the Flat-Head Indian pappooses. At five or ten or

fifteen years old they put their hands up to their foreheads and ask, What are they strapping down my brains in this way for? So they tear off the sacred bandages of the great Flat-Head tribe, and there follows a mighty rush of blood to the long-compressed region. This accounts, in the most lucid manner, for those sudden freaks with which certain children of this class astonish their worthy parents at the period of life when they are growing fast, and, the frontal pressure beginning to be felt as something intolerable, they tear off the holy compresses.

The hour for school came, and they went to the great hall for study. It would not have occurred to Mr. Silas Peckham to ask his assistant whether he felt well enough to attend to his duties; and Mr. Bernard chose to be at his post. A little headache and confusion were all that remained of his symptoms.

Later, in the course of the forenoon, Elsie Venner came and took her place. The girls all stared at her, — naturally enough; for it was hardly to have been expected that she would show herself, after such an event in the household to which she belonged. Her expression was somewhat peculiar, and, of course, was attributed to the shock her feelings had undergone on hearing of the crime attempted by her cousin and daily companion. When she was looking on her book, or on any indifferent object, her countenance betrayed some inward dis-

turbance, which knitted her dark brows, and seemed to throw a deeper shadow over her features. But, from time to time, she would lift her eyes toward Mr. Bernard, and let them rest upon him, without a thought, seemingly, that she herself was the subject of observation or remark. Then they seemed to lose their cold glitter, and soften into a strange, dreamy tenderness. The deep instincts of womanhood were striving to grope their way to the surface of her being through all the alien influences which overlaid them. She could be secret and cunning in working out any of her dangerous impulses, but she did not know how to mask the unwonted feeling which fixed her eyes and her thoughts upon the only person who had ever reached the spring of her hidden sympathies.

The girls all looked at Elsie, whenever they could steal a glance unperceived, and many of them were struck with this singular expression her features wore. They had long whispered it around among each other that she had a liking for the master; but there were too many of them of whom something like this could be said, to make it very remarkable. Now, however, when so many little hearts were fluttering at the thought of the peril through which the handsome young master had so recently passed, they were more alive than ever to the supposed relation between him and the dark school-girl. Some had supposed there was a mutual attachment between

them; there was a story that they were secretly betrothed, in accordance with the rumor which had been current in the village. At any rate, some conflict was going on in that still, remote, clouded soul, and all the girls who looked upon her face were impressed and awed as they had never been before by the shadows that passed over it.

One of these girls was more strongly arrested by Elsie's look than the others. This was a delicate, pallid creature, with a high forehead, and wide-open pupils, which looked as if they could take in all the shapes that flit in what, to common eyes, is darkness, — a girl said to be *clairvoyant* under certain influences. In the *recess*, as it was called, or interval of suspended studies in the middle of the forenoon, this girl carried her autograph-book, — for she had one of those indispensable appendages of the boarding-school miss of every degree, — and asked Elsie to write her name in it. She had an irresistible feeling, that, sooner or later, and perhaps very soon, there would attach an unusual interest to this autograph. Elsie took the pen and wrote, in her sharp Italian hand,

Elsie Venner, Infelix.

It was a remembrance, doubtless, of the forlorn queen of the "Æneid"; but its coming to her thought in this way confirmed the sensitive school-girl in her fears for Elsie, and she let fall a tear upon the page before she closed it.

Of course, the keen and practised observation of Helen Darley could not fail to notice the change of Elsie's manner and expression. She had long seen that she was attracted to the young master, and had thought, as the old Doctor did, that any impression which acted upon her affections might be the means of awakening a new life in her singularly isolated nature. Now, however, the concentration of the poor girl's thoughts upon the one object which had had power to reach her deeper sensibilities was so painfully revealed in her features, that Helen began to fear once more, lest Mr. Bernard, in escaping the treacherous violence of an assassin, had been left to the equally dangerous consequences of a violent, engrossing passion in the breast of a young creature whose love it would be ruin to admit and might be deadly to reject. She knew her own heart too well to fear that any jealousy might mingle with her new apprehensions. It was understood between Bernard and Helen that they were too good friends to tamper with the silences and edging proximities of love-making. She knew, too, the simply human, not masculine, interest which Mr. Bernard took in Elsie; he had been frank with Helen, and more than satisfied her that with all the pity and sympathy which overflowed his soul, when he thought of the stricken girl, there mingled not one drop of such love as a youth may feel for a maiden.

It may help the reader to gain some under-

standing of the anomalous nature of Elsie Venner, if we look with Helen into Mr. Bernard's opinions and feelings with reference to her, as they had shaped themselves in his consciousness at the period of which we are speaking.

At first he had been impressed by her wild beauty, and the contrast of all her looks and ways with those of the girls around her. Presently a sense of some ill-defined personal element, which half attracted and half repelled those who looked upon her, and especially those on whom she looked, began to make itself obvious to him, as he soon found it was painfully sensible to his more susceptible companion, the lady-teacher. It was not merely in the cold light of her diamond eyes, but in all her movements, in her graceful postures as she sat, in her costume, and, he sometimes thought, even in her speech, that this obscure and exceptional character betrayed itself. When Helen had said, that, if they were living in times when human beings were subject to *possession*, she should have thought there was something not human about Elsie, it struck an unsuspected vein of thought in his own mind, which he hated to put in words, but which was continually trying to articulate itself among the dumb thoughts which lie under the perpetual stream of mental whispers.

Mr. Bernard's professional training had made him slow to accept marvellous stories and many forms of superstition. Yet, as a man of science,

he well knew that just on the verge of the demonstrable facts of physics and physiology there is a nebulous border-land which what is called "common sense" perhaps does wisely not to enter, but which uncommon sense, or the fine apprehension of privileged intelligences, may cautiously explore, and in so doing find itself behind the scenes which make up for the gazing world the show which is called Nature.

It was with something of this finer perception, perhaps with some degree of imaginative exaltation, that he set himself to solving the problem of Elsie's influence to attract and repel those around her. His letter already submitted to the reader hints in what direction his thoughts were disposed to turn. Here was a magnificent organization, superb in vigorous womanhood, with a beauty such as never comes but after generations of culture; yet through all this rich nature there ran some alien current of influence, sinuous and dark, as when a clouded streak seams the white marble of a perfect statue.

It would be needless to repeat the particular suggestions which had come into his mind, as they must probably have come into that of the reader who has noted the singularities of Elsie's tastes and personal traits. The images which certain poets had dreamed of seemed to have become a reality before his own eyes. Then came that unexplained adventure of The Mountain, — almost like a dream in recollection, yet

assuredly real in some of its main incidents,—with all that it revealed or hinted. This girl did not fear to visit the dreaded region, where danger lurked in every nook and beneath every tuft of leaves. Did the tenants of the fatal ledge recognize some mysterious affinity which made them tributary to the cold glitter of her diamond eyes? Was she from her birth one of those frightful children, such as he had read about, and the Professor had told him of, who form unnatural friendships with cold, writhing ophidians? There was no need of so unwelcome a thought as this; she had drawn him away from the dark opening in the rock at the moment when he seemed to be threatened by one of its malignant denizens; that was all he could be sure of; the counter-fascination might have been a dream, a fancy, a coincidence. All wonderful things soon grow doubtful in our own minds, as do even common events, if great interests prove suddenly to attach to their truth or falsehood.

—— I, who am telling of these occurrences, saw a friend in the great city, on the morning of a most memorable disaster, hours after the time when the train which carried its victims to their doom had left. I talked with him, and was for some minutes, at least, in his company. When I reached home, I found that the story had gone before that he was among the lost, and I alone could contradict it to his weeping friends and relatives. I did contradict it; but, alas! I began

soon to doubt myself, penetrated by the contagion of their solicitude; my recollection began to question itself; the order of events became dislocated; and when I heard that he had reached home in safety, the relief was almost as great to me as to those who had expected to see their own brother's face no more.

Mr. Bernard was disposed, then, not to accept the thought of any odious personal relationship of the kind which had suggested itself to him when he wrote the letter referred to. That the girl had something of the feral nature, her wild, lawless rambles in forbidden and blasted regions of The Mountain at all hours, her familiarity with the lonely haunts where any other human foot was so rarely seen, proved clearly enough. But the more he thought of all her strange instincts and modes of being, the more he became convinced that whatever alien impulse swayed her will and modulated or diverted or displaced her affections came from some impression that reached far back into the past, before the days when the faithful Old Sophy had rocked her in the cradle. He believed that she had brought her ruling tendency, whatever it was, into the world with her.

When the school was over and the girls had all gone, Helen lingered in the school-room to speak with Mr. Bernard.

"Did you remark Elsie's ways this forenoon?" she said.

"No, not particularly; I have not noticed anything as sharply as I commonly do; my head has been a little queer, and I have been thinking over what we were talking about, and how near I came to solving the great problem which every day makes clear to such multitudes of people. What about Elsie?"

"Bernard, her liking for you is growing into a passion. I have studied girls for a long while, and I know the difference between their passing fancies and their real emotions. I told you, you remember, that Rosa would have to leave us; we barely missed a scene, I think, if not a whole tragedy, by her going at the right moment. But Elsie is infinitely more dangerous to herself and others. Women's love is fierce enough, if it once gets the mastery of them, always; but this poor girl does not know what to do with a passion."

Mr. Bernard had never told Helen the story of the flower in his Virgil, or that other adventure which he would have felt awkwardly to refer to; but it had been perfectly understood between them that Elsie showed in her own singular way a well-marked partiality for the young master.

"Why don't they take her away from the school, if she is in such a strange, excitable state?" said Mr. Bernard.

"I believe they are afraid of her," Helen answered. "It is just one of those cases that are ten thousand thousand times worse than insanity.

I don't think, from what I hear, that her father has ever given up hoping that she will outgrow her peculiarities. Oh, these peculiar children for whom parents go on hoping every morning and despairing every night! If I could tell you half that mothers have told me, you would feel that the worst of all diseases of the moral sense and the will are those which all the Bedlams turn away from their doors as not being cases of insanity!"

"Do you think her father has treated her judiciously?" said Mr. Bernard.

"I think," said Helen, with a little hesitation, which Mr. Bernard did not happen to notice,— "I think he has been very kind and indulgent, and I do not know that he could have treated her otherwise with a better chance of success."

"He must of course be fond of her," Mr. Bernard said; "there is nothing else in the world for him to love."

Helen dropped a book she held in her hand, and, stooping to pick it up, the blood rushed into her cheeks.

"It is getting late," she said; "you must not stay any longer in this close school-room. Pray, go and get a little fresh air before dinner-time."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SOUL IN DISTRESS.

The events told in the last two chapters had taken place toward the close of the week. On Saturday evening the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather received a note which was left at his door by an unknown person who departed without saying a word. Its words were these:—

"One who is in distress of mind requests the prayers of this congregation that God would be pleased to look in mercy upon the soul that he has afflicted."

There was nothing to show from whom the note came, or the sex or age or special source of spiritual discomfort or anxiety of the writer. The handwriting was delicate and might well be a woman's. The clergyman was not aware of any particular affliction among his parishioners which was likely to be made the subject of a request of this kind. Surely neither of the Venners would advertise the attempted crime of their relative in this way. But who else was there? The more he thought about it, the more it puzzled him; and as he did not like to pray in the dark, with-

out knowing for whom he was praying, he could think of nothing better than to step into old Doctor Kittredge's and see what he had to say about it.

The old Doctor was sitting alone in his study when the Reverend Mr. Fairweather was ushered in. He received his visitor very pleasantly, expecting, as a matter of course, that he would begin with some new grievance, dyspeptic, neuralgic, bronchitic, or other. The minister, however, began with questioning the old Doctor about the sequel of the other night's adventure; for he was already getting a little Jesuitical, and kept back the object of his visit until it should come up as if accidentally in the course of conversation.

"It was a pretty bold thing to go off alone with that reprobate, as you did," said the minister.

"I don't know what there was bold about it," the Doctor answered. "All he wanted was to get away. He was not quite a reprobate, you see; he didn't like the thought of disgracing his family or facing his uncle. I think he was ashamed to see his cousin, too, after what he had done."

"Did he talk with you on the way?"

"Not much. For half an hour or so he didn't speak a word. Then he asked where I was driving him. I told him, and he seemed to be surprised into a sort of grateful feeling. Bad enough, no doubt, — but might be worse. Has some hu-

manity left in him yet. Let him go. God can judge him, — I can't."

"You are too charitable, Doctor," the minister said. "I condemn him just as if he had carried out his project, which, they say, was to make it appear as if the school-master had committed suicide. That's what people think the rope found by him was for. He has saved his neck, — but his soul is a lost one, I am afraid, beyond question."

"I can't judge men's souls," the Doctor said. "I can judge their acts, and hold them responsible for those, — but I don't know much about their souls. If you or I had found our soul in a half-breed body, and been turned loose to run among the Indians, we might have been playing just such tricks as this fellow has been trying. What if you or I had inherited all the tendencies that were born with his cousin Elsie?"

"Oh, that reminds me," — the minister said, in a sudden way, — "I have received a note, which I am requested to read from the pulpit to-morrow. I wish you would just have the kindness to look at it and see where you think it came from."

The Doctor examined it carefully. It was a woman's or girl's note, he thought. Might come from one of the school-girls who was anxious about her spiritual condition. Handwriting was disguised; looked a little like Elsie Venner's, but not characteristic enough to make it certain. It would be a new thing, if she had asked public

prayers for herself, and a very favorable indication of a change in her singular moral nature. It was just possible Elsie might have sent that note. Nobody could foretell her actions. It would be well to see the girl and find out whether any unusual impression had been produced on her mind by the recent occurrence or by any other cause.

The Reverend Mr. Fairweather folded the note and put it into his pocket.

"I have been a good deal exercised in mind lately, myself," he said.

The old Doctor looked at him through his spectacles, and said, in his usual professional tone,—

"Put out your tongue."

The minister obeyed him in that feeble way common with persons of weak character, — for people differ as much in their mode of performing this trifling act as Gideon's soldiers in their way of drinking at the brook. The Doctor took his hand and placed a finger mechanically on his wrist.

"It is more spiritual, I think, than bodily," said the Reverend Mr. Fairweather.

"Is your appetite as good as usual?" the Doctor asked.

"Pretty good," the minister answered; "but my sleep, my sleep, Doctor,— I am greatly troubled at night with lying awake and thinking of my future,— I am not at ease in mind.'

He looked round at all the doors, to be sure they were shut, and moved his chair up close to the Doctor's.

"You do not know the mental trials I have been going through for the last few months."

"I think I do," the old Doctor said. "You want to get out of the new church into the old one, don't you?"

The minister blushed deeply; he thought he had been going on in a very quiet way, and that nobody suspected his secret. As the old Doctor was his counsellor in sickness, and almost everybody's confidant in trouble, he had intended to impart cautiously to him some hints of the change of sentiments through which he had been passing. He was too late with his information, it appeared, and there was nothing to be done but to throw himself on the Doctor's good sense and kindness, which everybody knew, and get what hints he could from him as to the practical course he should pursue. He began, after an awkward pause, —

"You would not have me stay in a communion which I feel to be alien to the true church, would you?"

"Have you stay, my friend?" said the Doctor, with a pleasant, friendly look, — "have you stay? Not a month, nor a week, nor a day, if I could help it. You have got into the wrong pulpit, and I have known it from the first. The sooner you go where you belong, the better. And I'm very glad you don't mean to stop half-way. Don't you know you've always come to me when you've been dyspeptic or sick anyhow, and wanted to

put yourself wholly into my hands, so that I might order you like a child just what to do and what to take? That's exactly what you want in religion. I don't blame you for it. You never liked to take the responsibility of your own body; I don't see why you should want to have the charge of your own soul. But I'm glad you're going to the Old Mother of all. You wouldn't have been contented short of that."

The Reverend Mr. Fairweather breathed with more freedom. The Doctor saw into his soul through those awful spectacles of his, — into it and beyond it, as one sees through a thin fog. But it was with a real human kindness, after all. He felt like a child before a strong man; but the strong man looked on him with a father's indulgence. Many and many a time, when he had come desponding and bemoaning himself on account of some contemptible bodily infirmity, the old Doctor had looked at him through his spectacles, listened patiently while he told his ailments, and then, in his large parental way, given him a few words of wholesome advice, and cheered him up so that he went off with a light heart, thinking that the heaven he was so much afraid of was not so very near, after all. It was the same thing now. He felt, as feeble natures always do in the presence of strong ones, overmastered, circumscribed, shut in, humbled; but yet it seemed as if the old Doctor did not despise him any more for what he considered weakness of mind than he

used to despise him when he complained of his nerves or his digestion.

Men who see *into* their neighbors are very apt to be contemptuous; but men who see *through* them find something lying behind every human soul which it is not for them to sit in judgment on, or to attempt to sneer out of the order of God's manifold universe.

Little as the Doctor had said out of which comfort could be extracted, his genial manner had something grateful in it. A film of gratitude came over the poor man's cloudy, uncertain eye, and a look of tremulous relief and satisfaction played about his weak mouth. He was gravitating to the majority, where he hoped to find "rest"; but he was dreadfully sensitive to the opinions of the minority he was on the point of leaving.

The old Doctor saw plainly enough what was going on in his mind.

"I sha'n't quarrel with you," he said, — "you know that very well; but you mustn't quarrel with me, if I talk honestly with you; it isn't everybody that will take the trouble. You flatter yourself that you will make a good many enemies by leaving your old communion. Not so many as you think. This is the way the common sort of people will talk: — 'You have got your ticket to the feast of life, as much as any other man that ever lived. Protestantism says, — "Help yourself; here's a clean plate, and a knife and

fork of your own, and plenty of fresh dishes to choose from." The Old Mother says, — "Give me your ticket, my dear, and I'll feed you with my gold spoon off these beautiful old wooden trenchers. Such nice bits as those good old gentlemen have left for you!" There is no quarrelling with a man who prefers broken victuals.' That's what the rougher sort will say; and then, where one scolds, ten will laugh. But, mind you, I don't either scold or laugh. I don't feel sure that you could very well have helped doing what you will soon do. You know you were never easy without some medicine to take when you felt ill in body. I'm afraid I've given you trashy stuff sometimes, just to keep you quiet. Now, let me tell you, there is just the same difference in spiritual patients that there is in bodily ones. One set believes in wholesome ways of living, and another must have a great list of specifics for all the soul's complaints. You belong with the last, and got accidentally shuffled in with the others."

The minister smiled faintly, but did not reply. Of course, he considered that way of talking as the result of the Doctor's professional training. It would not have been worth while to take offence at his plain speech, if he had been so disposed; for he might wish to consult him the next day as to "what he should take" for his dyspepsia or his neuralgia.

He left the Doctor with a hollow feeling at the

bottom of his soul, as if a good piece of his manhood had been scooped out of him. His hollow aching did not explain itself in words, but it grumbled and worried down among the unshaped thoughts which lie beneath them. He knew that he had been trying to reason himself out of his birthright of reason. He knew that the inspiration which gave him understanding was losing its throne in his intelligence, and the almighty Majority-Vote was proclaiming itself in its stead. He knew that the great primal truths, which each successive revelation only confirmed, were fast becoming hidden beneath the mechanical forms of thought, which, as with all new converts, engrossed so large a share of his attention. The "peace," the "rest," which he had purchased, were dearly bought to one who had been trained to the arms of thought, and whose noble privilege it might have been to live in perpetual warfare for the advancing truth which the next generation will claim as the legacy of the present.

The Reverend Mr. Fairweather was getting careless about his sermons. He must wait the fitting moment to declare himself; and in the mean time he was preaching to heretics. It did not matter much what he preached, under such circumstances. He pulled out two old yellow sermons from a heap of such, and began looking over that for the forenoon. Naturally enough, he fell asleep over it, and, sleeping, he began to dream.

He dreamed that he was under the high arches of an old cathedral, amidst a throng of worshippers. The light streamed in through vast windows, dark with the purple robes of royal saints, or blazing with yellow glories around the heads of earthly martyrs and heavenly messengers. The billows of the great organ roared among the clustered columns, as the sea breaks amidst the basaltic pillars which crowd the stormy cavern of the Hebrides. The voice of the alternate choirs of singing boys swung back and forward, as the silver censer swung in the hands of the white-robed children. The sweet cloud of incense rose in soft, fleecy mists, full of penetrating suggestions of the East and its perfumed altars. The knees of twenty generations had worn the pavement; their feet had hollowed the steps; their shoulders had smoothed the columns. Dead bishops and abbots lay under the marble of the floor in their crumbled vestments; dead warriors, in rusted armor, were stretched beneath their sculptured effigies. And all at once all the buried multitudes who had ever worshipped there came thronging in through the aisles. They choked every space, they swarmed into all the chapels, they hung in clusters over the parapets of the galleries, they clung to the images in every niche, and still the vast throng kept flowing and flowing in, until the living were lost in the rush of the returning dead who had reclaimed their own. Then, as his dream became more fan-

tastic, the huge cathedral itself seemed to change into the wreck of some mighty antediluvian vertebrate; its flying-buttresses arched round like ribs, its piers shaped themselves into limbs, and the sound of the organ-blast changed to the wind whistling through its thousand-jointed skeleton.

And presently the sound lulled, and softened and softened, until it was as the murmur of a distant swarm of bees. A procession of monks wound along through an old street, chanting, as they walked. In his dream he glided in among them and bore his part in the burden of their song. He entered with the long train under a low arch, and presently he was kneeling in a narrow cell before an image of the Blessed Maiden holding the Divine Child in her arms, and his lips seemed to whisper, —

Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis!

He turned to the crucifix, and, prostrating himself before the spare, agonizing shape of the Holy Sufferer, fell into a long passion of tears and broken prayers. He rose and flung himself, worn-out, upon his hard pallet, and, seeming to slumber, dreamed again within his dream. Once more in the vast cathedral, with throngs of the living choking its aisles, amidst jubilant peals from the cavernous depths of the great organ, and choral melodies ringing from the fluty throats of the singing boys. A day of great rejoicings, — for

a prelate was to be consecrated, and the bones of the mighty skeleton-minster were shaking with anthems, as if there were life of its own within its buttressed ribs. He looked down at his feet; the folds of the sacred robe were flowing about them: he put his hand to his head; it was crowned with the holy mitre. A long sigh, as of perfect content in the consummation of all his earthly hopes, breathed through the dreamer's lips, and shaped itself, as it escaped, into the blissful murmur, —

Ego sum Episcopus!

One grinning gargoyle looked in from beneath the roof through an opening in a stained window. It was the face of a mocking fiend, such as the old builders loved to place under the eaves to spout the rain through their open mouths. It looked at him, as he sat in his mitred chair, with its hideous grin growing broader and broader, until it laughed out aloud, — such a hard, stony, mocking laugh, that he awoke out of his second dream through his first into his common consciousness, and shivered, as he turned to the two yellow sermons which he was to pick over and weed of the little thought they might contain, for the next day's service.

The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather was too much taken up with his own bodily and spiritual condition to be deeply mindful of others. He carried the note requesting the prayers of the

congregation in his pocket all day; and the soul in distress, which a single tender petition might have soothed, and perhaps have saved from despair or fatal error, found no voice in the temple to plead for it before the Throne of Mercy!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SECRET IS WHISPERED.

The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather's congregation was not large, but select. The lines of social cleavage run through religious creeds as if they were of a piece with position and fortune. It is expected of persons of a certain breeding, in some parts of New England, that they shall be either Episcopalians or Unitarians. The mansion-house gentry of Rockland were pretty fairly divided between the little chapel with the stained window and the trained rector, and the meeting-house where the Reverend Mr. Fairweather officiated.

It was in the latter that Dudley Venner worshipped, when he attended service anywhere, — which depended very much on the caprice of Elsie. He saw plainly enough that a generous and liberally cultivated nature might find a refuge and congenial souls in either of these two persuasions, but he objected to some points of the formal creed of the older church, and especially to the mechanism which renders it hard to get free from its outworn and offensive for-

mulæ, — remembering how Archbishop Tillotson wished in vain that it could be "well rid of" the Athanasian Creed. This, and the fact that the meeting-house was nearer than the chapel, determined him, when the new rector, who was not quite up to his mark in education, was appointed, to take a pew in the "liberal" worshippers' edifice.

Elsie was very uncertain in her feeling about going to church. In summer, she loved rather to stroll over The Mountain, on Sundays. There was even a story, that she had one of the caves before mentioned fitted up as an oratory, and that she had her own wild way of worshipping the God whom she sought in the dark chasms of the dreaded cliffs. Mere fables, doubtless; but they showed the common belief, that Elsie, with all her strange and dangerous elements of character, had yet strong religious feeling mingled with them. The hymn-book which Dick had found, in his midnight invasion of her chamber, opened to favorite hymns, especially some of the Methodist and Quietist character. Many had noticed, that certain tunes, as sung by the choir, seemed to impress her deeply; and some said, that at such times her whole expression would change, and her stormy look would soften so as to remind them of her poor, sweet mother.

On the Sunday morning after the talk recorded in the last chapter, Elsie made herself ready to go to meeting. She was dressed much as usual,

excepting that she wore a thick veil, turned aside, but ready to conceal her features. It was natural enough that she should not wish to be looked in the face by curious persons who would be staring to see what effect the occurrence of the past week had had on her spirits. Her father attended her willingly; and they took their seats in the pew, somewhat to the surprise of many, who had hardly expected to see them, after so humiliating a family development as the attempted crime of their kinsman had just been furnishing for the astonishment of the public.

The Reverend Mr. Fairweather was now in his coldest mood. He had passed through the period of feverish excitement which marks a change of religious opinion. At first, when he had begun to doubt his own theological positions, he had defended them against himself with more ingenuity and interest, perhaps, than he could have done against another; because men rarely take the trouble to understand anybody's difficulties in a question but their own. After this, as he began to draw off from different points of his old belief, the cautious disentangling of himself from one mesh after another gave sharpness to his intellect, and the tremulous eagerness with which he seized upon the doctrine which, piece by piece, under various pretexts and with various disguises, he was appropriating, gave interest and something like passion to his words. But when he had gradually accustomed his people

to his new phraseology, and was really adjusting his sermons and his service to disguise his thoughts, he lost at once all his intellectual acuteness and all his spiritual fervor.

Elsie sat quietly through the first part of the service, which was conducted in the cold, mechanical way to be expected. Her face was hidden by her veil; but her father knew her state of feeling, as well by her movements and attitudes as by the expression of her features. The hymn had been sung, the short prayer offered, the Bible read, and the long prayer was about to begin. This was the time at which the "notes" of any who were in affliction from loss of friends, the sick who were doubtful of recovery, those who had cause to be grateful for preservation of life or other signal blessing, were wont to be read.

Just then it was that Dudley Venner noticed that his daughter was trembling, — a thing so rare, so unaccountable, indeed, under the circumstances, that he watched her closely, and began to fear that some nervous paroxysm, or other malady, might have just begun to show itself in this way upon her.

The minister had in his pocket two notes. One, in the handwriting of Deacon Soper, was from a member of this congregation, returning thanks for his preservation through a season of great peril, — supposed to be the exposure which he had shared with others, when standing in the circle around Dick Venner. The other was the

anonymous one, in a female hand, which he had received the evening before. He forgot them both. His thoughts were altogether too much taken up with more important matters. He prayed through all the frozen petitions of his expurgated form of supplication, and not a single heart was soothed or lifted, or reminded that its sorrows were struggling their way up to heaven, borne on the breath from a human soul that was warm with love.

The people sat down as if relieved when the dreary prayer was finished. Elsie alone remained standing until her father touched her. Then she sat down, lifted her veil, and looked at him with a blank, sad look, as if she had suffered some pain or wrong, but could not give any name or expression to her vague trouble. She did not tremble any longer, but remained ominously still, as if she had been frozen where she sat.

—— Can a man love his own soul too well? Who, on the whole, constitute the nobler class of human beings? those who have lived mainly to make sure of their own personal welfare in another and future condition of existence, or they who have worked with all their might for their race, for their country, for the advancement of the kingdom of God, and left all personal arrangements concerning themselves to the sole charge of Him who made them and is responsible to Himself for their safe-keeping? Is an anchorite who has worn the stone floor of his cell into

basins with his knees bent in prayer, more acceptable than the soldier who gives his life for the maintenance of any sacred right or truth, without thinking what will specially become of him in a world where there are two or three million colonists a month, from this one planet, to be cared for? These are grave questions, which must suggest themselves to those who know that there are many profoundly selfish persons who are sincerely devout and perpetually occupied with their own future, while there are others who are perfectly ready to sacrifice themselves for any worthy object in this world, but are really too little occupied with their exclusive personality to think so much as many do about what is to become of them in another.

The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather did not, most certainly, belong to this latter class. There are several kinds of believers, whose history we find among the early converts to Christianity.

There was the magistrate, whose social position was such that he preferred a private interview in the evening with the Teacher to following him with the street-crowd. He had seen extraordinary facts which had satisfied him that the young Galilean had a divine commission. But still he cross-questioned the Teacher himself. He was not ready to accept statements without explanation. That was the right kind of man. See how he stood up for the legal rights of his Master, when the people were for laying hands on him!

And again, there was the government official, intrusted with public money, which, in those days, implied that he was supposed to be honest. A single look of that heavenly countenance, and two words of gentle command, were enough for him. Neither of these men, the early disciple nor the evangelist, seems to have been thinking primarily about his own personal safety.

But now look at the poor, miserable turnkey, whose occupation shows what he was like to be, and who had just been thrusting two respectable strangers, taken from the hands of a mob, covered with stripes and stripped of clothing, into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks. His thought, in the moment of terror, is for himself: first, suicide; then, what he shall do, — not to save his household, — not to fulfil his duty to his office, — not to repair the outrage he has been committing, — but to secure his own personal safety. Truly, character shows itself as much in a man's way of becoming a Christian as in any other!

—— Elsie sat, statue-like, through the sermon. It would not be fair to the reader to give an abstract of that. When a man who has been bred to free thought and free speeeh suddenly finds himself stepping about, like a dancer amidst his eggs, among the old addled majority-votes which he must not tread upon, he is a spectacle for men and angels. Submission to intellectual precedent and authority does very well for those who

have been bred to it; we know that the underground courses of their minds are laid in the Roman cement of tradition, and that stately and splendid structures may be reared on such a foundation. But to see one laying a platform over heretical quicksands, thirty or forty or fifty years deep, and then beginning to build upon it, is a sorry sight. A new convert from the reformed to the ancient faith may be very strong in the arms, but he will always have weak legs and shaky knees. He may use his hands well, and hit hard with his fists, but he will never stand on his legs in the way the man does who inherits his belief.

The services were over at last, and Dudley Venner and his daughter walked home together in silence. He always respected her moods, and saw clearly enough that some inward trouble was weighing upon her. There was nothing to be said in such cases, for Elsie could never talk of her griefs. An hour, or a day, or a week of brooding, with perhaps a sudden flash of violence: this was the way in which the impressions which make other women weep, and tell their griefs by word or letter, showed their effects in her mind and acts.

She wandered off up into the remoter parts of The Mountain, that day, after their return. No one saw just where she went, — indeed, no one knew its forest-recesses and rocky fastnesses as she did. She was gone until late at night; and

when Old Sophy, who had watched for her, bound up her long hair for her sleep, it was damp with the cold dews.

The old black woman looked at her without speaking, but questioning her with every feature as to the sorrow that was weighing on her.

Suddenly she turned to Old Sophy.

"You want to know what there is troubling me," she said. "Nobody loves me. I cannot love anybody. What is love, Sophy?"

"It's what poor Ol' Sophy's got for her Elsie," the old woman answered. "Tell me, darlin', — don' you love somebody? — don' you love ——? you know, — oh, tell me, darlin', don' you love to see the gen'l'man that keeps up at the school where you go? They say he's the pootiest gen-'l'man that was ever in the town here. Don' be 'fraid of poor Ol' Sophy, darlin', — she loved a man once, — see here! Oh, I've showed you this often enough!"

She took from her pocket a half of one of the old Spanish silver coins, such as were current in the earlier part of this century. The other half of it had been lying in the deep sea-sand for more than fifty years.

Elsie looked her in the face, but did not answer in words. What strange intelligence was that which passed between them through the diamond eyes and the little beady black ones? — what subtile intercommunication, penetrating so much deeper than articulate speech? This was the

nearest approach to sympathetic relations that Elsie ever had: a kind of dumb intercourse of feeling, such as one sees in the eyes of brute mothers looking on their young. But, subtile as it was, it was narrow and individual; whereas an emotion which can shape itself in language opens the gate for itself into the great community of human affections; for every word we speak is the medal of a dead thought or feeling, struck in the die of some human experience, worn smooth by innumerable contacts, and always transferred warm from one to another. By words we share the common consciousness of the race, which has shaped itself in these symbols. By music we reach those special states of consciousness which, being without *form*, cannot be shaped with the mosaics of the vocabulary. The language of the eyes runs deeper into the personal nature, but it is purely individual, and perishes in the expression. If we consider them all as growing out of the consciousness as their root, language is the leaf, music is the flower; but when the eyes meet and search each other, it is the uncovering of the blanched stem through which the whole life runs, but which has never taken color or form from the sunlight.

For three days Elsie did not return to the school. Much of the time she was among the woods and rocks. The season was now beginning to wane, and the forest to put on its autumnal glory. The dreamy haze was beginning to

soften tne landscape, and the most delicious days of the year were lending their attraction to the scenery of The Mountain. It was not very singular that Elsie should be lingering in her old haunts, from which the change of season must soon drive her. But Old Sophy saw clearly enough that some internal conflict was going on, and knew very well that it must have its own way and work itself out as it best could. As much as looks could tell Elsie had told her. She had said in words, to be sure, that she could not love. Something warped and thwarted the emotion which would have been love in another, no doubt; but that such an emotion was striving with her against all malign influences which interfered with it the old woman had a perfect certainty in her own mind.

Everybody who has observed the working of emotions in persons of various temperaments knows well enough that they have periods of *incubation*, which differ with the individual, and with the particular cause and degree of excitement, yet evidently go through a strictly self-limited series of evolutions, at the end of which, their result — an act of violence, a paroxysm of tears, a gradual subsidence into repose, or whatever it may be — declares itself, like the last stage of an attack of fever and ague. No one can observe children without noticing that there is a *personal equation*, to use the astronomer's language, in their tempers, so that one sulks an hour

over an offence which makes another a fury for five minutes, and leaves him or her an angel when it is over.

At the end of three days, Elsie braided her long, glossy, black hair, and shot a golden arrow through it. She dressed herself with more than usual care, and came down in the morning superb in her stormy beauty. The brooding paroxysm was over, or at least her passion had changed its phase. Her father saw it with great relief; he had always many fears for her in her hours and days of gloom, but, for reasons before assigned, had felt that she must be trusted to herself, without appealing to actual restraint, or any other supervision than such as Old Sophy could exercise without offence.

She went off at the accustomed hour to the school. All the girls had their eyes on her. None so keen as these young misses to know an inward movement by an outward sign of adornment: if they have not as many signals as the ships that sail the great seas, there is not an end of ribbon or a turn of a ringlet which is not a hieroglyphic with a hidden meaning to these little cruisers over the ocean of sentiment.

The girls all looked at Elsie with a new thought; for she was more sumptuously arrayed than perhaps ever before at the school; and they said to themselves that she had come meaning to draw the young master's eyes upon her. That was it; what else could it be? The beautiful,

cold girl with the diamond eyes meant to dazzle the handsome young gentleman. He would be afraid to love her; it couldn't be true, that which some people had said in the village; she wasn't the kind of young lady to make Mr. Langdon happy. Those dark people are never safe: so one of the young blondes said to herself. Elsie was not literary enough for such a scholar: so thought Miss Charlotte Ann Wood, the young poetess. She couldn't have a good temper, with those scowling eyebrows: this was the opinion of several broad-faced, smiling girls, who thought, each in her own snug little mental *sanctum*, that, if, etc., etc., she could make him *so* happy!

Elsie had none of the still, wicked light in her eyes, that morning. She looked gentle, but dreamy; played with her books; did not trouble herself with any of the exercises, — which in itself was not very remarkable, as she was always allowed, under some pretext or other, to have her own way.

The school-hours were over at length. The girls went out, but she lingered to the last. She then came up to Mr. Bernard, with a book in her hand, as if to ask a question.

"Will you walk towards my home with me today?" she said, in a very low voice, little more than a whisper.

Mr. Bernard was startled by the request, put in such a way. He had a presentiment of some painful scene or other. But there was nothing

to be done but to assure her that it would give him great pleasure.

So they walked along together on their way toward the Dudley mansion.

"I have no friend," Elsie said, all at once. "Nothing loves me but one old woman. I cannot love anybody. They tell me there is something in my eyes that draws people to me and makes them faint. Look into them, will you?"

She turned her face toward him. It was very pale, and the diamond eyes were glittering with a film, such as beneath other lids would have rounded into a tear.

"Beautiful eyes, Elsie," he said, — "sometimes very piercing, — but soft now, and looking as if there were something beneath them that friendship might draw out. I am your friend, Elsie. Tell me what I can do to render your life happier."

"*Love me!*" said Elsie Venner.

What shall a man do, when a woman makes such a demand, involving such an avowal? It was the tenderest, cruellest, humblest moment of Mr. Bernard's life. He turned pale, he trembled almost, as if he had been a woman listening to her lover's declaration.

"Elsie," he said, presently, "I so long to be of some use to you, to have your confidence and sympathy, that I must not let you say or do anything to put us in false relations. I do love you, Elsie, as a suffering sister with sorrows of

her own, — as one whom I would save at the risk of my happiness and life, — as one who needs a true friend more than any of all the young girls I have known. More than this you would not ask me to say. You have been through excitement and trouble lately, and it has made you feel such a need more than ever. Give me your hand, dear Elsie, and trust me that I will be as true a friend to you as if we were children of the same mother."

Elsie gave him her hand mechanically. It seemed to him that a cold *aura* shot from it along his arm and chilled the blood running through his heart. He pressed it gently, looked at her with a face full of grave kindness and sad interest, then softly relinquished it.

It was all over with poor Elsie. They walked almost in silence the rest of the way. Mr. Bernard left her at the gate of the mansion-house, and returned with sad forebodings. Elsie went at once to her own room, and did not come from it at the usual hours. At last Old Sophy began to be alarmed about her, went to her apartment, and, finding the door unlocked, entered cautiously. She found Elsie lying on her bed, her brows strongly contracted, her eyes dull, her whole look that of great suffering. Her first thought was that she had been doing herself a harm by some deadly means or other. But Elsie saw her fear, and reassured her.

" No," she said, " there is nothing wrong, such

as you are thinking of; I am not dying. You may send for the Doctor; perhaps he can take the pain from my head. That is all I want him to do. There is no use in the pain, that I know of; if he can stop it, let him."

So they sent for the old Doctor. It was not long before the solid trot of Caustic, the old bay horse, and the crashing of the gravel under the wheels, gave notice that the physician was driving up the avenue.

The old Doctor was a model for visiting practitioners. He always came into the sick-room with a quiet, cheerful look, as if he had a consciousness that he was bringing some sure relief with him. The way a patient snatches his first look at his doctor's face, to see whether he is doomed, whether he is reprieved, whether he is unconditionally pardoned, has really something terrible about it. It is only to be met by an imperturbable mask of serenity, proof against anything and everything in a patient's aspect. The physician whose face reflects his patient's condition like a mirror may do well enough to examine people for a life-insurance office, but does not belong to the sick-room. The old Doctor did not keep people waiting in dread suspense, while he stayed talking about the case,—the patient all the time thinking that he and the friends are discussing some alarming symptom or formidable operation which he himself is by-and-by to hear of.

He was in Elsie's room almost before she

knew he was in the house. He came to her bedside in such a natural, quiet way, that it seemed as if he were only a friend who had dropped in for a moment to say a pleasant word. Yet he was very uneasy about Elsie until he had seen her; he never knew what might happen to her or those about her, and came prepared for the worst.

"Sick, my child?" he said, in a very soft, low voice.

Elsie nodded, without speaking.

The Doctor took her hand, — whether with professional views, or only in a friendly way, it would have been hard to tell. So he sat a few minutes, looking at her all the time with a kind of fatherly interest, but with it all noting how she lay, how she breathed, her color, her expression, all that teaches the practised eye so much without a single question being asked. He saw she was in suffering, and said presently, —

"You have pain somewhere; where is it?"

She put her hand to her head.

As she was not disposed to talk, he watched her for a while, questioned Old Sophy shrewdly a few minutes, and so made up his mind as to the probable cause of disturbance and the proper remedies to be used.

Some very silly people thought the old Doctor did not believe in medicine, because he gave less than certain poor half-taught creatures in the smaller neighboring towns, who took advan-

tage of people's sickness to disgust and disturb them with all manner of ill-smelling and ill-behaving drugs. In truth, he hated to give anything noxious or loathsome to those who were uncomfortable enough already, unless he was very sure it would do good, — in which case, he never played with drugs, but gave good, honest, efficient doses. Sometimes he lost a family of the more boorish sort, because they did not think they got their money's worth out of him, unless they had something more than a taste of everything he carried in his saddle-bags.

He ordered some remedies which he thought would relieve Elsie, and left her, saying he would call the next day, hoping to find her better. But the next day came, and the next, and still Elsie was on her bed, — feverish, restless, wakeful, silent. At night she tossed about and wandered, and it became at length apparent that there was a settled attack, something like what they called formerly, a "nervous fever."

On the fourth day she was more restless than common. One of the women of the house came in to help to take care of her; but she showed an aversion to her presence.

"Send me Helen Darley," she said, at last.

The old Doctor told them, that, if possible, they must indulge this fancy of hers. The caprices of sick people were never to be despised, least of all of such persons as Elsie, when rendered irritable and exacting by pain and weakness.

So a message was sent to Mr. Silas Peckham, at the Apollinean Institute, to know if he could not spare Miss Helen Darley for a few days, if required, to give her attention to a young lady who attended his school and who was now lying ill,— no other person than the daughter of Dudley Venner.

A mean man never agrees to anything without deliberately turning it over, so that he may see its dirty side, and, if he can, sweating the coin he pays for it. If an archangel should offer to save his soul for sixpence, he would try to find a sixpence with a hole in it. A gentleman says yes to a great many things without stopping to think: a shabby fellow is known by his caution in answering questions, for fear of compromising his pocket or himself.

Mr. Silas Peckham looked very grave at the request. The dooties of Miss Darley at the Institoot were important, very important. He paid her large sums of money for her time, — more than she could expect to get in any other institootion for the edoocation of female youth. A deduction from her selary would be necessary, in case she should retire from the sphere of her dooties for a season. He should be put to extry expense, and have to perform additional labors himself. He would consider of the matter. If any arrangement could be made, he would send word to Squire Venner's folks.

" Miss Darley," said Silas Peckham, " the' 's a

message from Squire Venner's that his daughter wants you down at the mansion-house to see her. She's got a fever, so they inform me. If it's any kind of ketchin' fever, of course you won't think of goin' near the mansion-house. If Doctor Kittredge says it's safe, perfec'ly safe, I can't objec' to your goin', on sech conditions as seem to be fair to all concerned. You will give up your pay for the whole time you are absent, — portions of days to be caounted as whole days. You will be charged with board the same as if you ēat your victuals with the household. The victuals are of no use after they're cooked but to be ēat, and your bein' away is no savin' to our folks. I shall charge you a reasonable compensation for the demage to the school by the absence of a teacher. If Miss Crabs undertakes any dooties belongin' to your department of instruction, she will look to you for sech pecooniary considerations as you may agree upon between you. On these conditions I am willin' to give my consent to your temporary absence from the post of dooty. I will step down to Doctor Kittredge's, myself, and make inquiries as to the natur' of the complaint."

Mr. Peckham took up a rusty and very narrow-brimmed hat, which he cocked upon one side of his head, with an air peculiar to the rural gentry. It was the hour when the Doctor expected to be in his office, unless he had some special call which kept him from home.

He found the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather just taking leave of the Doctor. His hand was on the pit of his stomach, and his countenance expressive of inward uneasiness.

"Shake it before using," said the Doctor; "and the sooner you make up your mind to speak right out, the better it will be for your digestion."

"Oh, Mr. Peckham! Walk in, Mr. Peckham! Nobody sick up at the school, I hope?"

"The haälth of the school is fust-rate," replied Mr. Peckham. "The sitooation is uncommonly favorable to saloobrity." (These last words were from the Annual Report of the past year.) "Providence has spared our female youth in a remarkable measure. I've come with reference to another consideration. Doctor Kittredge, is there any ketchin' complaint goin' about in the village?"

"Well, yes," said the Doctor, "I should say there was something of that sort. Measles. Mumps. And Sin, — that's always catching."

The old Doctor's eye twinkled; once in a while he had his little touch of humor.

Silas Peckham slanted his eye up suspiciously at the Doctor, as if he was getting some kind of advantage over him. That is the way people of his constitution are apt to take a bit of pleasantry.

"I don't mean sech things, Doctor; I mean fevers. Is there any ketchin' fevers — bilious, or nervous, or typus, or whatever you call 'em — now

goin' round this village? That's what I want to ascertain, if there's no impropriety."

The old Doctor looked at Silas through his spectacles.

"Hard and sour as a green cider-apple," he thought to himself. "No," he said, — "I don't know any such cases."

"What's the matter with Elsie Venner?" asked Silas, sharply, as if he expected to have him this time.

"A mild feverish attack, I should call it in anybody else; but she has a peculiar constitution, and I never feel so safe about her as I should about most people."

"Anything ketchin' about it?" Silas asked, cunningly.

"No, indeed!" said the Doctor, — "catching? — no, — what put that into your head, Mr. Peckham?"

"Well, Doctor," the conscientious Principal answered, "I naterally feel a graät responsibility, a very graääät responsibility, for the noomerous and lovely young ladies committed to my charge. It has been a question, whether one of my assistants should go, accordin' to request, to stop with Miss Venner for a season. Nothin' restrains my givin' my full and free consent to her goin' but the fear lest contagious maladies should be introdooced among those lovely female youth. I shall abide by your opinion, — I understan' you to say distinc'ly, her complaint is not ketchin'? — and urge upon Miss

Darley to fulfil her dooties to a sufferin' fellow-creature at any cost to myself and my establishment. We shall miss her very much; but it is a good cause, and she shall go, — and I shall trust that Providence will enable us to spare her without permanent demage to the interests of the Institootion."

Saying this, the excellent Principal departed, with his rusty narrow-brimmed hat leaning over, as if it had a six-knot breeze abeam, and its gunwale (so to speak) was dipping into his coat-collar. He announced the result of his inquiries to Helen, who had received a brief note in the mean time from a poor relation of Elsie's mother, then at the mansion-house, informing her of the critical situation of Elsie and of her urgent desire that Helen should be with her. She could not hesitate. She blushed as she thought of the comments that might be made; but what were such considerations in a matter of life and death? She could not stop to make terms with Silas Peckham. She must go. He might fleece her, if he would; she would not complain, — not even to Bernard, who, she knew, would bring the Principal to terms, if she gave the least hint of his intended extortions.

So Helen made up her bundle of clothes to be sent after her, took a book or two with her to help her pass the time, and departed for the Dudley mansion. It was with a great inward effort that she undertook the sisterly task which was thus

forced upon her. She had a kind of terror of Elsie; and the thought of having charge of her, of being alone with her, of coming under the full influence of those diamond eyes, — if, indeed, their light were not dimmed by suffering and weariness, — was one she shrank from. But what could she do? It might be a turning-point in the life of the poor girl; and she must overcome all her fears, all her repugnance, and go to her rescue.

"Is Helen come?" said Elsie, when she heard, with her fine sense quickened by the irritability of sickness, a light footfall on the stair, with a cadence unlike that of any inmate of the house.

"It's a strange woman's step," said Old Sophy, who, with her exclusive love for Elsie, was naturally disposed to jealousy of a new-comer. "Let Ol' Sophy set at th' foot o' th' bed, if th' young missis sets by th' piller, — won' y', darlin'? The' 's nobody that's white can love y' as th' ol' black woman does; — don' sen' her away, now, there's a dear soul!"

Elsie motioned her to sit in the place she had pointed to, and Helen at that moment entered the room. Dudley Venner followed her.

"She is your patient," he said, "except while the Doctor is here. She has been longing to have you with her, and we shall expect you to make her well in a few days."

So Helen Darley found herself established in the most unexpected manner as an inmate of the

Dudley mansion. She sat with Elsie most of the time, by day and by night, soothing her, and trying to enter into her confidence and affections, if it should prove that this strange creature was really capable of truly sympathetic emotions.

What was this unexplained something which came between her soul and that of every other human being with whom she was in relations? Helen perceived, or rather felt, that she had, folded up in the depths of her being, a true womanly nature. Through the cloud that darkened her aspect, now and then a ray would steal forth, which, like the smile of stern and solemn people, was all the more impressive from its contrast with the expression she wore habitually. It might well be that pain and fatigue had changed her aspect; but, at any rate, Helen looked into her eyes without that nervous agitation which their cold glitter had produced on her when they were full of their natural light. She felt sure that her mother must have been a lovely, gentle woman. There were gleams of a beautiful nature shining through some ill-defined medium which disturbed and made them flicker and waver, as distant images do when seen through the rippling upward currents of heated air. She loved, in her own way, the old black woman, and seemed to keep up a kind of silent communication with her, as if they did not require the use of speech. She appeared to be tranquillized by the presence of Helen, and loved to have her seated at the bedside. Yet

something, whatever it was, prevented her from opening her heart to her kind companion; and even now there were times when she would lie looking at her, with such a still, watchful, almost dangerous expression, that Helen would sigh, and change her place, as persons do whose breath some cunning orator has been sucking out of them with his spongy eloquence, so that, when he stops, they must get some air and stir about, or they feel as if they should be half-smothered and palsied.

It was too much to keep guessing what was the meaning of all this. Helen determined to ask Old Sophy some questions which might probably throw light upon her doubts. She took the opportunity one evening when Elsie was lying asleep and they were both sitting at some distance from her bed.

"Tell me, Sophy," she said, "was Elsie always as shy as she seems to be now, in talking with those to whom she is friendly?"

"Alway jes' so, Miss Darlin', ever sence she was little chil'. When she was five, six year old, she lisp some, — call me *Thophy;* that make her kin' o' 'shamed, perhaps: after she grow up, she never lisp, but she kin' o' got the way o' not talkin' much. Fac' is, she don' like talkin' as common gals do, 'xcep' jes' once in a while wi' some partic'lar folks, — 'n' then not much."

"How old is Elsie?"

"Eighteen year this las' September."

"How long ago did her mother die?" Helen asked, with a little trembling in her voice.

"Eighteen year ago this October," said Old Sophy.

Helen was silent for a moment. Then she whispered, almost inaudibly, — for her voice appeared to fail her, —

"What did her mother die of, Sophy?"

The old woman's small eyes dilated until a ring of white showed round their beady centres. She caught Helen by the hand and clung to it, as if in fear. She looked round at Elsie, who lay sleeping, as if she might be listening. Then she drew Helen towards her and led her softly out of the room.

"'Sh! — 'sh!" she said, as soon as they were outside the door. "Don' never speak in this house 'bout what Elsie's mother died of!" she said. "Nobody never says nothin' 'bout it. Oh, God has made Ugly Things wi' death in their mouths, Miss Darlin', an' He knows what they're for; but my poor Elsie! — to have her blood changed in her before —— It was in July Mistress got her death, but she liv' till three week after my poor Elsie was born."

She could speak no more. She had said enough. Helen remembered the stories she had heard on coming to the village, and among them one referred to in an early chapter of this narrative. All the unaccountable looks and tastes and ways of Elsie came back to her in the light

of an ante-natal impression which had mingled an alien element in her nature. She knew the secret of the fascination which looked out of her cold, glittering eyes. She knew the significance of the strange repulsion which she felt in her own intimate consciousness underlying the inexplicable attraction which drew her towards the young girl in spite of this repugnance. She began to look with new feelings on the contradictions in her moral nature, — the longing for sympathy, as shown by her wishing for Helen's company, and the impossibility of passing beyond the cold circle of isolation within which she had her being. The fearful truth of that instinctive feeling of hers, that there was something not human looking out of Elsie's eyes, came upon her with a sudden flash of penetrating conviction. There were two warring principles in that superb organization and proud soul. One made her a woman, with all a woman's powers and longings. The other chilled all the currents of outlet for her emotions. It made her tearless and mute, when another woman would have wept and pleaded. And it infused into her soul something — it was cruel now to call it malice — which was still and watchful and dangerous, — which waited its opportunity, and then shot like an arrow from its bow out of the coil of brooding premeditation. Even those who had never seen the white scars on Dick Venner's wrist, or heard the half-told story of her sup-

posed attempt to do a graver mischief, knew well enough by looking at her that she was one of the creatures not to be tampered with, — silent in anger and swift in vengeance.

Helen could not return to the bedside at once after this communication. It was with altered eyes that she must look on the poor girl, the victim of such an unheard-of fatality. All was explained to her now. But it opened such depths of solemn thought in her awakened consciousness, that it seemed as if the whole mystery of human life were coming up again before her for trial and judgment. "Oh," she thought, "if, while the will lies sealed in its fountain, it may be poisoned at its very source, so that it shall flow dark and deadly through its whole course, who are we that we should judge our fellow-creatures by ourselves?" Then came the terrible question, how far the elements themselves are capable of perverting the moral nature: if valor, and justice, and truth, the strength of man and the virtue of woman, may not be poisoned out of a race by the food of the Australian in his forest, — by the foul air and darkness of the Christians cooped up in the "tenement-houses" close by those who live in the palaces of the great cities?

She walked out into the garden, lost in thought upon these dark and deep matters. Presently she heard a step behind her, and Elsie's father came up and joined her. Since his introduction

to Helen at the distinguished tea-party given by the Widow Rowens, and before her coming to sit with Elsie, Mr. Dudley Venner had in the most accidental way in the world met her on several occasions: once after church, when she happened to be caught in a slight shower and he insisted on holding his umbrella over her on her way home; — once at a small party at one of the mansion-houses, where the quick-eyed lady of the house had a wonderful knack of bringing people together who liked to see each other; — perhaps at other times and places; but of this there is no certain evidence.

They naturally spoke of Elsie, her illness, and the aspect it had taken. But Helen noticed in all that Dudley Venner said about his daughter a morbid sensitiveness, as it seemed to her, an aversion to saying much about her physical condition or her peculiarities, — a wish to feel and speak as a parent should, and yet a shrinking, as if there were something about Elsie which he could not bear to dwell upon. She thought she saw through all this, and she could interpret it all charitably. There were circumstances about his daughter which recalled the great sorrow of his life; it was not strange that this perpetual reminder should in some degree have modified his feelings as a father. But what a life he must have been leading for so many years, with this perpetual source of distress which he could not name! Helen knew well

enough, now, the meaning of the sadness which had left such traces in his features and tones, and it made her feel very kindly and compassionate towards him.

So they walked over the crackling leaves in the garden, between the lines of box breathing its fragrance of eternity; — for this is one of the odors which carry us out of time into the abysses of the unbeginning past; if we ever lived on another ball of stone than this, it must be that there was box growing on it. So they walked, finding their way softly to each other's sorrows and sympathies, each matching some counterpart to the other's experience of life, and startled to see how the different, yet parallel, lessons they had been taught by suffering had led them step by step to the same serene acquiescence in the orderings of that Supreme Wisdom which they both devoutly recognized.

Old Sophy was at the window and saw them walking up and down the garden-alleys. She watched them as her grandfather the savage watched the figures that moved among the trees when a hostile tribe was lurking about his mountain.

"There'll be a weddin' in the ol' house," she said, "before there's roses on them bushes ag'in. But it won' be my poor Elsie's weddin', 'n' Ol' Sophy won' be there."

When Helen prayed in the silence of her soul that evening, it was not that Elsie's life might be

spared. She dared not ask that as a favor of Heaven. What could life be to her but a perpetual anguish, and to those about her an ever-present terror? Might she but be so influenced by divine grace, that what in her was most truly human, most purely woman-like, should overcome the dark, cold, unmentionable instinct which had pervaded her being like a subtile poison: that was all she could ask, and the rest she left to a higher wisdom and tenderer love than her own.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WHITE ASH.

When Helen returned to Elsie's bedside, it was with a new and still deeper feeling of sympathy, such as the story told by Old Sophy might well awaken. She understood, as never before, the singular fascination and as singular repulsion which she had long felt in Elsie's presence. It had not been without a great effort that she had forced herself to become the almost constant attendant of the sick girl; and now she was learning, but not for the first time, the blessed truth which so many good women have found out for themselves, that the hardest duty bravely performed soon becomes a habit, and tends in due time to transform itself into a pleasure.

The old Doctor was beginning to look graver, in spite of himself. The fever, if such it was, went gently forward, wasting the young girl's powers of resistance from day to day; yet she showed no disposition to take nourishment, and seemed literally to be living on air. It was remarkable that with all this her look was almost natural, and her features were hardly sharpened

so as to suggest that her life was burning away. He did not like this, nor various other unobtrusive signs of danger which his practised eye detected. A very small matter might turn the balance which held life and death poised against each other. He surrounded her with precautions, that Nature might have every opportunity of cunningly shifting the weights from the scale of death to the scale of life, as she will often do, if not rudely disturbed or interfered with.

Little tokens of good-will and kind remembrance were constantly coming to her from the girls in the school and the good people in the village. Some of the mansion-house people obtained rare flowers which they sent her, and her table was covered with fruits which tempted her in vain. Several of the school-girls wished to make her a basket of their own handiwork, and, filling it with autumnal flowers, to send it as a joint offering. Mr. Bernard found out their project accidentally, and, wishing to have his share in it, brought home from one of his long walks some boughs full of variously tinted leaves, such as were still clinging to the stricken trees. With these he brought also some of the already fallen leaflets of the white ash, remarkable for their rich olive-purple color, forming a beautiful contrast with some of the lighter-hued leaves. It so happened that this particular tree, the white ash, did not grow upon The Mountain, and the leaflets were more welcome for their comparative rarity.

So the girls made their basket, and the floor of it they covered with the rich olive-purple leaflets. Such late flowers as they could lay their hands upon served to fill it, and with many kindly messages they sent it to Miss Elsie Venner at the Dudley mansion-house.

Elsie was sitting up in her bed when it came, languid, but tranquil, and Helen was by her, as usual, holding her hand, which was strangely cold, Helen thought, for one who was said to have some kind of fever. The school-girls' basket was brought in with its messages of love and hopes for speedy recovery. Old Sophy was delighted to see that it pleased Elsie, and laid it on the bed before her. Elsie began looking at the flowers and taking them from the basket, that she might see the leaves. All at once she appeared to be agitated; she looked at the basket, — then around, as if there were some fearful presence about her which she was searching for with her eager glances. She took out the flowers, one by one, her breathing growing hurried, her eyes staring, her hands trembling, — till, as she came near the bottom of the basket, she flung out all the rest with a hasty movement, looked upon the olive-purple leaflets as if paralyzed for a moment, shrunk up, as it were, into herself in a curdling terror, dashed the basket from her, and fell back senseless, with a faint cry which chilled the blood of the startled listeners at her bedside.

"Take it away! — take it away! — quick!

said Old Sophy, as she hastened to her mistress's pillow. "It's the leaves of the tree that was always death to her, — take it away! She can't live wi' it in the room!"

The poor old woman began chafing Elsie's hands, and Helen to try to rouse her with hartshorn, while a third frightened attendant gathered up the flowers and the basket and carried them out of the apartment. She came to herself after a time, but exhausted and then wandering. In her delirium she talked constantly as if she were in a cave, with such exactness of circumstance that Helen could not doubt at all that she had some such retreat among the rocks of The Mountain, probably fitted up in her own fantastic way, where she sometimes hid herself from all human eyes, and of the entrance to which she alone possessed the secret.

All this passed away, and left her, of course, weaker than before. But this was not the only influence the unexplained paroxysm had left behind it. From this time forward there was a change in her whole expression and her manner. The shadows ceased flitting over her features, and the old woman, who watched her from day to day and from hour to hour as a mother watches her child, saw the likeness she bore to her mother coming forth more and more, as the cold glitter died out of the diamond eyes, and the stormy scowl disappeared from the dark brows and low forehead.

With all the kindness and indulgence her father had bestowed upon her, Elsie had never felt that he loved her. The reader knows well enough what fatal recollections and associations had frozen up the springs of natural affection in his breast. There was nothing in the world he would not do for Elsie. He had sacrificed his whole life to her. His very seeming carelessness about restraining her was all calculated; he knew that restraint would produce nothing but utter alienation. Just so far as she allowed him, he shared her studies, her few pleasures, her thoughts; but she was essentially solitary and uncommunicative. No person, as was said long ago, could judge him, — because his task was not merely difficult, but simply impracticable to human powers. A nature like Elsie's had necessarily to be studied by itself, and to be followed in its laws where it could not be led.

Every day, at different hours, during the whole of his daughter's illness, Dudley Venner had sat by her, doing all he could to soothe and please her. Always the same thin film of some emotional non-conductor between them; always that kind of habitual regard and family-interest, mingled with the deepest pity on one side and a sort of respect on the other, which never warmed into outward evidences of affection.

It was after this occasion, when she had been so profoundly agitated by a seemingly insignificant cause, that her father and Old Sophy were

sitting, one at one side of her bed and one at the other. She had fallen into a light slumber. As they were looking at her, the same thought came into both their minds at the same moment. Old Sophy spoke for both, as she said, in a low voice, —

"It's her mother's look, — it's her mother's own face right over again, — she never look' so before, — the Lord's hand is on her! His will be done!"

When Elsie woke and lifted her languid eyes upon her father's face, she saw in it a tenderness, a depth of affection, such as she remembered at rare moments of her childhood, when she had won him to her by some unusual gleam of sunshine in her fitful temper.

"Elsie, dear," he said, "we were thinking how much your expression was sometimes like that of your sweet mother. If you could but have seen her, so as to remember her!"

The tender look and tone, the yearning of the daughter's heart for the mother she had never seen, save only with the unfixed, undistinguishing eyes of earliest infancy, perhaps the underthought that she might soon rejoin her in another state of being, — all came upon her with a sudden overflow of feeling which broke through all the barriers between her heart and her eyes, and Elsie wept. It seemed to her father as if the malign influence — evil spirit it might almost be called — which had pervaded her being, had

at last been driven forth or exorcised, and that these tears were at once the sign and the pledge of her redeemed nature. But now she was to be soothed, and not excited. After her tears she slept again, and the look her face wore was peaceful as never before.

Old Sophy met the Doctor at the door and told him all the circumstances connected with the extraordinary attack from which Elsie had suffered. It was the purple leaves, she said. She remembered that Dick once brought home a branch of a tree with some of the same leaves on it, and Elsie screamed and almost fainted then. She, Sophy, had asked her, after she had got quiet, what it was in the leaves that made her feel so bad. Elsie couldn't tell her, — didn't like to speak about it, — shuddered whenever Sophy mentioned it.

This did not sound so strangely to the old Doctor as it does to some who listen to this narrative. He had known some curious examples of antipathies, and remembered reading of others still more singular. He had known those who could not bear the presence of a cat, and recollected the story, often told, of a person's hiding one in a chest when one of these sensitive individuals came into the room, so as not to disturb him; but he presently began to sweat and turn pale, and cried out that there must be a cat hid somewhere. He knew people who were poisoned by strawberries, by honey, by different

meats, — many who could not endure cheese, — some who could not bear the smell of roses. If he had known all the stories in the old books, he would have found that some have swooned and become as dead men at the smell of a rose, — that a stout soldier has been known to turn and run at the sight or smell of rue, — that cassia and even olive-oil have produced deadly faintings in certain individuals, — in short, that almost everything has seemed to be a poison to somebody.

"Bring me that basket, Sophy," said the old Doctor, "if you can find it."

Sophy brought it to him, — for he had not yet entered Elsie's apartment.

"These purple leaves are from the white ash," he said. "You don't know the notion that people commonly have about that tree, Sophy?"

"I know they say the Ugly Things never go where the white ash grows," Sophy answered. "Oh, Doctor dear, what I'm thinkin' of a'n't true, is it?"

The Doctor smiled sadly, but did not answer. He went directly to Elsie's room. Nobody would have known by his manner that he saw any special change in his patient. He spoke with her as usual, made some slight alteration in his prescriptions, and left the room with a kind, cheerful look. He met her father on the stairs.

"Is it as I thought?" said Dudley Venner.

"There is everything to fear," the Doctor said,

"and not much, I am afraid, to hope. Does not her face recall to you one that you remember, as never before?"

"Yes," her father answered,—"oh, yes! What is the meaning of this change which has come over her features, and her voice, her temper, her whole being? Tell me, oh, tell me, what is it? Can it be that the curse is passing away, and my daughter is to be restored to me,—such as her mother would have had her,—such as her mother was?"

"Walk out with me into the garden," the Doctor said, "and I will tell you all I know and all I think about this great mystery of Elsie's life."

They walked out together, and the Doctor began:—

"She has lived a double being, as it were,—the consequence of the blight which fell upon her in the dim period before consciousness. You can see what she might have been but for this. You know that for these eighteen years her whole existence has taken its character from that influence which we need not name. But you will remember that few of the lower forms of life last as human beings do; and thus it might have been hoped and trusted with some show of reason, as I have always suspected you hoped and trusted, perhaps more confidently than myself, that the lower nature which had become ingrafted on the higher would die out and leave

the real woman's life she inherited to outlive this accidental principle which had so poisoned her childhood and youth. I believe it is so dying out; but I am afraid, — yes, I must say it, I fear it has involved the centres of life in its own decay. There is hardly any pulse at Elsie's wrist; no stimulants seem to rouse her; and it looks as if life were slowly retreating inwards, so that by-and-by she will sleep as those who lie down in the cold and never wake."

Strange as it may seem, her father heard all this not without deep sorrow, and such marks of it as his thoughtful and tranquil nature, long schooled by suffering, claimed or permitted, but with a resignation itself the measure of his past trials. Dear as his daughter might become to him, all he dared to ask of Heaven was that she might be restored to that truer self which lay beneath her false and adventitious being. If he could once see that the icy lustre in her eyes had become a soft, calm light, — that her soul was at peace with all about her and with Him above, — this crumb from the children's table was enough for him, as it was for the Syro-Phœnician woman who asked that the dark spirit might go out from her daughter.

There was little change the next day, until all at once she said in a clear voice that she should like to see her master at the school, Mr. Langdon. He came accordingly, and took the place of Helen at her bedside. It seemed as if Elsie had

forgotten the last scene with him. Might it be that pride had come in, and she had sent for him only to show how superior she had grown to the weakness which had betrayed her into that extraordinary request, so contrary to the instincts and usages of her sex? Or was it that the singular change which had come over her had involved her passionate fancy for him and swept it away with her other habits of thought and feeling? Or could it be that she felt that all earthly interests were becoming of little account to her, and wished to place herself right with one to whom she had displayed a wayward movement of her unbalanced imagination? She welcomed Mr. Bernard as quietly as she had received Helen Darley. He colored at the recollection of that last scene, when he came into her presence; but she smiled with perfect tranquillity. She did not speak to him of any apprehension; but he saw that she looked upon herself as doomed. So friendly, yet so calm did she seem through all their interview, that Mr. Bernard could only look back upon her manifestation of feeling towards him on their walk from the school as a vagary of a mind laboring under some unnatural excitement, and wholly at variance with the true character of Elsie Venner as he saw her before him in her subdued, yet singular beauty. He looked with almost scientific closeness of observation into the diamond eyes; but that peculiar light which he knew so

well was not there. She was the same in one sense as on that first day when he had seen her coiling and uncoiling her golden chain; yet how different in every aspect which revealed her state of mind and emotion! Something of tenderness there was, perhaps, in her tone towards him; she would not have sent for him, had she not felt more than an ordinary interest in him. But through the whole of his visit she never lost her gracious self-possession. The Dudley race might well be proud of the last of its daughters, as she lay dying, but unconquered by the feeling of the present or the fear of the future.

As for Mr. Bernard, he found it very hard to look upon her, and listen to her unmoved. There was nothing that reminded him of the stormy-browed, almost savage girl he remembered in her fierce loveliness, — nothing of all her singularities of air and of costume. Nothing? Yes, one thing. Weak and suffering as she was, she had never parted with one particular ornament, such as a sick person would naturally, as it might be supposed, get rid of at once. The golden cord which she wore round her neck at the great party was still there. A bracelet was lying by her pillow; she had unclasped it from her wrist.

Before Mr. Bernard left her, she said, —

"I shall never see you again. Some time or other, perhaps, you will mention my name to one whom you love. Give her this from your scholar and friend Elsie."

He took the bracelet, raised her hand to his lips, then turned his face away; in that moment he was the weaker of the two.

"Good-bye," she said; "thank you for coming."

His voice died away in his throat, as he tried to answer her. She followed him with her eyes as he passed from her sight through the door, and when it closed after him sobbed tremulously once or twice, — but stilled herself, and met Helen, as she entered, with a composed countenance.

"I have had a very pleasant visit from Mr. Langdon," Elsie said. "Sit by me, Helen, awhile without speaking; I should like to sleep, if I can, — and to dream."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GOLDEN CORD IS LOOSED.

The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather, hearing that his parishioner's daughter, Elsie, was very ill, could do nothing less than come to the mansion-house and tender such consolations as he was master of. It was rather remarkable that the old Doctor did not exactly approve of his visit. He thought that company of every sort might be injurious in her weak state. He was of opinion that Mr. Fairweather, though greatly interested in religious matters, was not the most sympathetic person that could be found; in fact, the old Doctor thought he was too much taken up with his own interests for eternity to give himself quite so heartily to the need of other people as some persons got up on a rather more generous scale (our good neighbor Dr. Honeywood, for instance) could do. However, all these things had better be arranged to suit her wants; if she would like to talk with a clergyman, she had a great deal better see one as often as she liked, and run the risk of the excitement, than have a hidden wish for such a

visit and perhaps find herself too weak to see him by-and-by.

The old Doctor knew by sad experience that dreadful mistake against which all medical practitioners should be warned. His experience may well be a guide for others. Do not overlook the desire for spiritual advice and consolation which patients sometimes feel, and, with the frightful *mauvaise honte* peculiar to Protestantism, alone among all human beliefs, are ashamed to tell. As a part of medical treatment, it is the physician's business to detect the hidden longing for the food of the soul, as much as for any form of bodily nourishment. Especially in the higher walks of society, where this unutterably miserable false shame of Protestantism acts in proportion to the general acuteness of the cultivated sensibilities, let no unwillingness to suggest the sick person's real need suffer him to languish between his want and his morbid sensitiveness. What an infinite advantage the Mussulmans and the Catholics have over many of our more exclusively spiritual sects in the way they keep their religion always by them and never blush for it! And besides this spiritual longing, we should never forget that

"On some fond breast the parting soul relies,"

and the minister of religion, in addition to the sympathetic nature which we have a right to

demand in him, has trained himself to the art of entering into the feelings of others.

The reader must pardon this digression, which introduces the visit of the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather to Elsie Venner. It was mentioned to her that he would like to call and see how she was, and she consented, — not with much apparent interest, for she had reasons of her own for not feeling any very deep conviction of his sym pathy for persons in sorrow. But he came, and worked the conversation round to religion, and confused her with his hybrid notions, half made up of what he had been believing and teaching all his life, and half of the new doctrines which he had veneered upon the surface of his old belief. He got so far as to make a prayer with her, — a cool well-guarded prayer, which compromised his faith as little as possible, and which, if devotion were a game played against Providence, might have been considered a cautious and sagacious move.

When he had gone, Elsie called Old Sophy to her.

"Sophy," she said, "don't let them send that cold-hearted man to me any more. If your old minister comes to see you, I should like to hear him talk. He looks as if he cared for everybody, and would care for me. And, Sophy, if I should die one of these days, I should like to have that old minister come and say whatever is to be said over me. It would comfort

Dudley more, I know, than to have that hard man here, when you're in trouble, — for some of you will be sorry when I'm gone, — won't you, Sophy?"

The poor old black woman could not stand this question. The cold minister had frozen Elsie until she felt as if nobody cared for her or would regret her, — and her question had betrayed this momentary feeling.

"Don' talk so! don' talk so, darlin'!" she cried, passionately. "When you go, Ol' Sophy'll go; 'n' where you go, Ol' Sophy'll go: 'n' we'll both go t' th' place where th' Lord takes care of all his children, whether their faces are white or black. Oh, darlin', darlin'! if th' Lord should let me die fus', you shall fin' all ready for you when you come after me. On'y don' go 'n' leave poor Ol' Sophy all 'lone in th' world!"

Helen came in at this moment and quieted the old woman with a look. Such scenes were just what were most dangerous, in the state in which Elsie was lying: but that is one of the ways in which an affectionate friend sometimes unconsciously wears out the life which a hired nurse, thinking of nothing but her regular duties and her wages, would have spared from all emotional fatigue.

The change which had come over Elsie's disposition was itself the cause of new excitements. How was it possible that her father could keep

away from her, now that she was coming back to the nature and the very look of her mother, the bride of his youth? How was it possible to refuse her, when she said to Old Sophy, that she should like to have her minister come in and sit by her, even though his presence might perhaps prove a new source of excitement?

But the Reverend Doctor did come and sit by her, and spoke such soothing words to her, words of such peace and consolation, that from that hour she was tranquil as never before. All true hearts are alike in the hour of need; the Catholic has a reserved fund of faith for his fellow-creature's trying moment, and the Calvinist reveals those springs of human brotherhood and charity in his soul which are only covered over by the iron tables inscribed with the harder dogmas of his creed. It was enough that the Reverend Doctor knew all Elsie's history. He could not judge her by any formula, like those which have been moulded by past ages out of their ignorance. He did not talk with her as if she were an outside sinner, worse than himself. He found a bruised and languishing soul, and bound up its wounds. A blessed office, — one which is confined to no sect or creed, but which good men in all times, under various names and with varying ministries, to suit the need of each age, of each race, of each individual soul, have come forward to discharge for their suffering fellow-creatures.

After this there was little change in Elsie, except that her heart beat more feebly every day, — so that the old Doctor himself, with all his experience, could see nothing to account for the gradual failing of the powers of life, and yet could find no remedy which seemed to arrest its progress in the smallest degree.

"Be very careful," he said, "that she is not allowed to make any muscular exertion. Any such effort, when a person is so enfeebled, may stop the heart in a moment; and if it stops, it will never move again."

Helen enforced this rule with the greatest care. Elsie was hardly allowed to move her hand or to speak above a whisper. It seemed to be mainly the question now, whether this trembling flame of life would be blown out by some light breath of air, or whether it could be so nursed and sheltered by the hollow of these watchful hands that it would have a chance to kindle to its natural brightness.

—— Her father came in to sit with her in the evening. He had never talked so freely with her as during the hour he had passed at her bedside, telling her little circumstances of her mother's life, living over with her all that was pleasant in the past, and trying to encourage her with some cheerful gleams of hope for the future. A faint smile played over her face, but she did not answer his encouraging suggestions. The hour

came for him to leave her with those who watched by her.

"Good-night, my dear child," he said, and, stooping down, kissed her cheek.

Elsie rose by a sudden effort, threw her arms round his neck, kissed him, and said, "Good-night, my dear father!"

The suddenness of her movement had taken him by surprise, or he would have checked so dangerous an effort. It was too late now. Her arms slid away from him like lifeless weights, — her head fell back upon her pillow, — a long sigh breathed through her lips.

"She is faint," said Helen, doubtfully; "bring me the hartshorn, Sophy."

The old woman had started from her place, and was now leaning over her, looking in her face, and listening for the sound of her breathing.

"She's dead! Elsie's dead! My darlin' 's dead!" she cried aloud, filling the room with her utterance of anguish.

Dudley Venner drew her away and silenced her with a voice of authority, while Helen and an assistant plied their restoratives. It was all in vain.

The solemn tidings passed from the chamber of death through the family. The daughter, the hope of that old and honored house, was dead in the freshness of her youth, and the home of its

solitary representative was hereafter doubly desolate.

A messenger rode hastily out of the avenue. A little after this the people of the village and the outlying farm-houses were startled by the sound of a bell.

One, — two, — three, — four, —

They stopped in every house, as far as the wavering vibrations reached, and listened ——

—— five, — six, — seven, —

It was not the little child which had been lying so long at the point of death; that could not be more than three or four years old ——

—— eight, — nine, — ten, — and so on to fifteen, — sixteen, — seventeen, — eighteen ——

—— ——

The pulsations seemed to keep on, — but it was the brain, and not the bell, that was throbbing now.

"Elsie's dead!" was the exclamation at a hundred firesides.

"Eighteen year old," said old Widow Peake, rising from her chair. "Eighteen year ago I laid two gold eagles on her mother's eyes, — he wouldn't have anything but gold touch her eyelids, — and now Elsie's to be straightened, — the Lord have mercy on her poor sinful soul!"

Dudley Venner prayed that night that he might be forgiven, if he had failed in any act of duty or kindness to this unfortunate child of his, now freed from all the woes born with her and so long

poisoning her soul. He thanked God for the brief interval of peace which had been granted her, for the sweet communion they had enjoyed in these last days, and for the hope of meeting her with that other lost friend in a better world.

Helen mingled a few broken thanks and petitions with her tears: thanks that she had been permitted to share the last days and hours of this poor sister in sorrow; petitions that the grief of bereavement might be lightened to the lonely parent and the faithful old servant.

Old Sophy said almost nothing, but sat day and night by her dead darling. But sometimes her anguish would find an outlet in strange sounds, something between a cry and a musical note, — such as none had ever heard her utter before. These were old remembrances surging up from her childish days, — coming through her mother from the cannibal chief, her grandfather, — death-wails, such as they sing in the mountains of Western Africa, when they see the fires on distant hill-sides and know that their own wives and children are undergoing the fate of captives.

The time came when Elsie was to be laid by her mother in the small square marked by the white stone.

It was not unwillingly that the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather had relinquished the duty of conducting the service to the Reverend Doc-

tor Honeywood, in accordance with Elsie's request. He could not, by any reasoning, reconcile his present way of thinking with a hope for the future of his unfortunate parishioner. Any good old Roman Catholic priest, born and bred to his faith and his business, would have found a loophole into some kind of heaven for her, by virtue of his doctrine of "invincible ignorance," or other special proviso; but a recent convert cannot enter into the working conditions of his new creed. Beliefs must be lived in for a good while, before they accommodate themselves to the soul's wants, and wear loose enough to be comfortable.

The Reverend Doctor had no such scruples. Like thousands of those who are classed nominally with the despairing believers, he had never prayed over a departed brother or sister without feeling and expressing a guarded hope that there was mercy in store for the poor sinner, whom parents, wives, children, brothers and sisters could not bear to give up to utter ruin without a word, — and would not, as he knew full well, in virtue of that human love and sympathy which nothing can ever extinguish. And in this poor Elsie's history he could read nothing which the tears of the recording angel might not wash away. As the good physician of the place knew the diseases that assailed the bodies of men and women, so he had learned the mysteries of the sickness of the soul.

So many wished to look upon Elsie's face once

more, that her father would not deny them; nay, he was pleased that those who remembered her living should see her in the still beauty of death. Helen and those with her arrayed her for this farewell-view. All was ready for the sad or curious eyes which were to look upon her. There was no painful change to be concealed by any artifice. Even her round neck was left uncovered, that she might be more like one who slept. Only the golden cord was left in its place: some searching eye might detect a trace of that birth-mark which it was whispered she had always worn a necklace to conceal.

At the last moment, when all the preparations were completed, Old Sophy stooped over her, and, with trembling hand, loosed the golden cord. She looked intently, for some little space: there was no shade nor blemish where the ring of gold had encircled her throat. She took it gently away and laid it in the casket which held her ornaments.

"The Lord be praised!" the old woman cried, aloud. "He has taken away the mark that was on her; she's fit to meet his holy angels now!"

So Elsie lay for hours in the great room, in a kind of state, with flowers all about her, — her black hair braided as in life, — her brows smooth, as if they had never known the scowl of passion, — and on her lips the faint smile with which she had uttered her last "Good-night." The young girls from the school looked

at her, one after another, and passed on, sobbing, carrying in their hearts the picture that would be with them all their days. The great people of the place were all there with their silent sympathy. The lesser kind of gentry, and many of the plainer folk of the village, half-pleased to find themselves passing beneath the stately portico of the ancient mansion-house, crowded in, until the ample rooms were overflowing. All the friends whose acquaintance we have made were there, and many from remoter villages and towns.

There was a deep silence at last. The hour had come for the parting words to be spoken over the dead. The good old minister's voice rose out of the stillness, subdued and tremulous at first, but growing firmer and clearer as he went on, until it reached the ears of the visitors who were in the far, desolate chambers, looking at the pictured hangings and the old dusty portraits. He did not tell her story in his prayer. He only spoke of our dear departed sister as one of many whom Providence in its wisdom has seen fit to bring under bondage from their cradles. It was not for us to judge them by any standard of our own. He who made the heart alone knew the infirmities it inherited or acquired. For all that our dear sister had presented that was interesting and attractive in her character we were to be grateful; for whatever was dark or inexplicable we must trust that the

deep shadow which rested on the twilight dawn of her being might render a reason before the bar of Omniscience; for the grace which had lightened her last days we should pour out our hearts in thankful acknowledgment. From the life and the death of this our dear sister we should learn a lesson of patience with our fellow-creatures in their inborn peculiarities, of charity in judging what seem to us wilful faults of character, of hope and trust, that, by sickness or affliction, or such inevitable discipline as life must always bring with it, if by no gentler means, the soul which had been left by Nature to wander into the path of error and of suffering might be reclaimed and restored to its true aim, and so led on by divine grace to its eternal welfare. He closed his prayer by commending each member of the afflicted family to the divine blessing.

Then all at once rose the clear sound of the girls' voices, in the sweet, sad melody of a funeral hymn,—one of those which Elsie had marked, as if prophetically, among her own favorites.

And so they laid her in the earth, and showered down flowers upon her, and filled her grave, and covered it with green sods. By the side of it was another oblong ridge, with a white stone standing at its head. Mr. Bernard looked upon it, as he came close to the place where Elsie was laid, and read the inscription,—

CATALINA

WIFE TO DUDLEY VENNER

DIED

OCTOBER 13TH 1840

AGED XX YEARS.

A gentle rain fell on the turf after it was laid. This was the beginning of a long and dreary autumnal storm, a deferred "equinoctial," as many considered it. The mountain streams were all swollen and turbulent, and the steep declivities were furrowed in every direction by new channels. It made the house seem doubly desolate to hear the wind howling and the rain beating upon the roofs. The poor relation who was staying at the house would insist on Helen's remaining a few days: Old Sophy was in such a condition, that it kept her in continual anxiety, and there were many cares which Helen could take off from her.

The old black woman's life was buried in her darling's grave. She did nothing but moan and lament for her. At night she was restless, and would get up and wander to Elsie's apartment and look for her and call her by name. At other times she would lie awake and listen to the wind and the rain, — sometimes with such a wild look upon her face, and with such sudden starts and exclamations, that it seemed as if she heard spirit-voices and were answering the

whispers of unseen visitants. With all this were mingled hints of her old superstition, — forebodings of something fearful about to happen, — perhaps the great final catastrophe of all things, according to the prediction current in the kitchens of Rockland.

"Hark!" Old Sophy would say, — "don' you hear th' crackin' 'n' th' snappin' up in Th' Mountain, 'n' th' rollin' o' th' big stones? The' 's somethin' stirrin' among th' rocks; I hear th' soun' of it in th' night, when th' wind has stopped blowin'. Oh, stay by me a little while, Miss Darlin'! stay by me! for it's th' Las' Day, maybe, that's close on us, 'n' I feel as if I couldn' meet th' Lord all alone!"

It was curious, — but Helen did certainly recognize sounds, during the lull of the storm, which were not of falling rain or running streams, — short snapping sounds, as of tense cords breaking, — long uneven sounds, as of masses rolling down steep declivities. But the morning came as usual; and as the others said nothing of these singular noises, Helen did not think it necessary to speak of them. All day long she and the humble relative of Elsie's mother, who had appeared as poor relations are wont to in the great crises of life, were busy in arranging the disordered house, and looking over the various objects which Elsie's singular tastes had brought together, to dispose of them as her father might direct. They all met together at

the usual hour for tea. One of the servants came in, looking very blank, and said to the poor relation, —

"The well is gone dry; we have nothing but rain-water."

Dudley Venner's countenance changed; he sprang to his feet and went to assure himself of the fact, and, if he could, of the reason of it. For a well to dry up during such a rain storm was extraordinary, — it was ominous.

He came back, looking very anxious.

"Did any of you notice any remarkable sounds last night," he said, — "or this morning? Hark! do you hear anything now?"

They listened in perfect silence for a few moments. Then there came a short cracking sound, and two or three snaps, as of parting cords.

Dudley Venner called all his household together.

"We are in danger here, as I think, to-night," he said, — "not very great danger, perhaps, but it is a risk I do not wish you to run. These heavy rains have loosed some of the rocks above, and they may come down and endanger the house. Harness the horses, Elbridge, and take all the family away. Miss Darley will go to the Institute; the others will pass the night at the Mountain House. I shall stay here, myself: it is not at all likely that anything will come of these warnings; but if

there should, I choose to be here and take my chance."

It needs little, generally, to frighten servants, and they were all ready enough to go. The poor relation was one of the timid sort, and was terribly uneasy to be got out of the house. This left no alternative, of course, for Helen, but to go also. They all urged upon Dudley Venner to go with them: if there was danger, why should he remain to risk it, when he sent away the others?

Old Sophy said nothing until the time came for her to go with the second of Elbridge's carriage-loads.

"Come, Sophy," said Dudley Venner, "get your things and go. They will take good care of you at the Mountain House; and when we have made sure that there is no real danger, you shall come back at once."

"No, Massa!" Sophy answered. "I've seen Elsie into th' ground, 'n' I a'n't goin' away to come back 'n' fin' Massa Venner buried under th' rocks. My darlin''s gone; 'n' now, if Massa goes, 'n' th' ol' place goes, it's time for Ol' Sophy to go, too. No, Massa Venner, we'll both stay in th' ol' mansion 'n' wait for th' Lord!"

Nothing could change the old woman's determination; and her master, who only feared, but did not really expect the long-deferred catastrophe, was obliged to consent to her staying. The sudden drying of the well at such a time was the

most alarming sign; for he remembered that the same thing had been observed just before great mountain-slides. This long rain, too, was just the kind of cause which was likely to loosen the strata of rock piled up in the ledges; if the dreaded event should ever come to pass, it would be at such a time.

He paced his chamber uneasily until long past midnight. If the morning came without accident, he meant to have a careful examination made of all the rents and fissures above, of their direction and extent, and especially whether, in case of a mountain-slide, the huge masses would be like to reach so far to the east and so low down the declivity as the mansion.

At two o'clock in the morning he was dozing in his chair. Old Sophy had lain down on her bed, and was muttering in troubled dreams.

All at once a loud crash seemed to rend the very heavens above them: a crack as of the thunder that follows close upon the bolt, — a rending and crushing as of a forest snapped through all its stems, torn, twisted, splintered, dragged with all its ragged boughs into one chaotic ruin. The ground trembled under them as in an earthquake; the old mansion shuddered so that all its windows chattered in their casements; the great chimney shook off its heavy cap-stones, which came down on the roof with resounding concussions; and the echoes of The Mountain roared and bellowed in long reduplica-

tion, as if its whole foundations were rent, and this were the terrible voice of its dissolution.

Dudley Venner rose from his chair, folded his arms, and awaited his fate. There was no knowing where to look for safety; and he remembered too well the story of the family that was lost by rushing out of the house, and so hurrying into the very jaws of death.

He had stood thus but for a moment, when he heard the voice of Old Sophy in a wild cry of terror: —

"It's th' Las' Day! It's th' Las' Day! The Lord is comin' to take us all!"

"Sophy!" he called; but she did not hear him or heed him, and rushed out of the house.

The worst danger was over. If they were to be destroyed, it would necessarily be in a few seconds from the first thrill of the terrible convulsion. He waited in awful suspense, but calm. Not more than one or two minutes could have passed before the frightful tumult and all its sounding echoes had ceased. He called Old Sophy; but she did not answer. He went to the western window and looked forth into the darkness. He could not distinguish the outlines of the landscape, but the white stone was clearly visible, and by its side the new-made mound. Nay, what was that which obscured its outline, in shape like a human figure? He flung open the window and sprang through. It was all that there was left of poor Old Sophy, stretched out, lifeless, upon her darling's grave.

He had scarcely composed her limbs and drawn the sheet over her, when the neighbors began to arrive from all directions. Each was expecting to hear of houses overwhelmed and families destroyed; but each came with the story that his own household was safe. It was not until the morning dawned that the true nature and extent of the sudden movement was ascertained. A great seam had opened above the long cliff, and the terrible Rattlesnake Ledge, with all its envenomed reptiles, its dark fissures and black caverns, was buried forever beneath a mighty incumbent mass of ruin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. SILAS PECKHAM RENDERS HIS ACCOUNT.

The morning rose clear and bright. The long storm was over, and the calm autumnal sunshine was now to return, with all its infinite repose and sweetness. With the earliest dawn exploring parties were out in every direction along the southern slope of The Mountain, tracing the ravages of the great slide and the track it had followed. It proved to be not so much a slide as the breaking off and falling of a vast line of cliff, including the dreaded Ledge. It had folded over like the leaves of a half-opened book when they close, crushing the trees below, piling its ruins in a glacis at the foot of what had been the overhanging wall of the cliff, and filling up that deep cavity above the mansion-house which bore the ill-omened name of Dead Man's Hollow. This it was which had saved the Dudley mansion. The falling masses, or huge fragments breaking off from them, would have swept the house and all around it to destruction but for this deep shelving dell, into which the stream of ruin was happily directed. It was, indeed,

one of Nature's conservative revolutions; for the fallen masses made a kind of shelf, which interposed a level break between the inclined planes above and below it, so that the nightmare-fancies of the dwellers in the Dudley mansion, and in many other residences under the shadow of The Mountain, need not keep them lying awake hereafter to listen for the snapping of roots and the splitting of the rocks above them.

Twenty-four hours after the falling of the cliff, it seemed as if it had happened ages ago. The new fact had fitted itself in with all the old predictions, forebodings, fears, and acquired the solidarity belonging to all events which have slipped out of the fingers of Time and dissolved in the antecedent eternity.

Old Sophy was lying dead in the Dudley mansion. If there were tears shed for her, they could not be bitter ones; for she had lived out her full measure of days, and gone — who could help fondly believing it? — to rejoin her beloved mistress. They made a place for her at the foot of the two mounds. It was thus she would have chosen to sleep, and not to have wronged her humble devotion in life by asking to lie at the side of those whom she had served so long and faithfully. There were very few present at the simple ceremony. Helen Darley was one of these few. The old black woman had been her companion in all the kind offices of which she had been the ministering angel to Elsie.

After it was all over, Helen was leaving with the rest, when Dudley Venner begged her to stay a little, and he would send her back: it was a long walk; besides, he wished to say some things to her, which he had not had the opportunity of speaking. Of course Helen could not refuse him; there must be many thoughts coming into his mind which he would wish to share with her who had known his daughter so long and been with her in her last days.

She returned into the great parlor with the wrought cornices and the medallion-portraits on the ceiling.

"I am now alone in the world," Dudley Venner said.

Helen must have known that before he spoke. But the tone in which he said it had so much meaning, that she could not find a word to answer him with. They sat in silence, which the old tall clock counted out in long seconds; but it was silence which meant more than any words they had ever spoken.

"Alone in the world. Helen, the freshness of my life is gone, and there is little left of the few graces which in my younger days might have fitted me to win the love of women. Listen to me, — kindly, if you can; forgive me, at least. Half my life has been passed in constant fear and anguish, without any near friend to share my trials. My task is done now; my fears have ceased to prey upon me; the sharpness of early

sorrows has yielded something of its edge to time. You have bound me to you by gratitude in the tender care you have taken of my poor child. More than this. I must tell you all now, out of the depth of this trouble through which I am passing. I have loved you from the moment we first met; and if my life has anything left worth accepting, it is yours. Will you take the offered gift?"

Helen looked in his face, surprised, bewildered.

"This is not for me, — not for me," she said. "I am but a poor faded flower, not worth the gathering of such a one as you. No, no, — I have been bred to humble toil all my days, and I could not be to you what you ought to ask. I am accustomed to a kind of loneliness and self-dependence. I have seen nothing, almost, of the world, such as you were born to move in. Leave me to my obscure place and duties; I shall at least have peace; — and you — you will surely find in due time some one better fitted by Nature and training to make you happy."

"No, Miss Darley!" Dudley Venner said, almost sternly. "You must not speak to a man, who has lived through my experiences, of looking about for a new choice after his heart has once chosen. Say that you can never love me; say that I have lived too long to share your young life; say that sorrow has left nothing in me for Love to find his pleasure in; but do not mock me with the hope of a new affection for some un-

known object. The first look of yours brought me to your side. The first tone of your voice sunk into my heart. From this moment my life must wither out or bloom anew. My home is desolate. Come under my roof and make it bright once more, — share my life with me, — or I shall give the halls of the old mansion to the bats and the owls, and wander forth alone without a hope or a friend!"

To find herself with a man's future at the disposal of a single word of hers! — a man like this, too, with a fascination for her against which she had tried to shut her heart, feeling that he lived in another sphere than hers, working as she was for her bread, a poor operative in the factory of a hard master and jealous overseer, the salaried drudge of Mr. Silas Peckham! Why, she had thought he was grateful to her as a friend of his daughter; she had even pleased herself with the feeling that he liked her, in her humble place, as a woman of some cultivation and many sympathetic points of relation with himself; but that he *loved* her, — that this deep, fine nature, in a man so far removed from her in outward circumstance, should have found its counterpart in one whom life had treated so coldly as herself, — that Dudley Venner should stake his happiness on a breath of hers, — poor Helen Darley's, — it was all a surprise, a confusion, a kind of fear not wholly fearful. Ah, me! women know what it is, — that mist over the eyes, that trembling in

the limbs, that faltering of the voice, that sweet, shame-faced, unspoken confession of weakness which does not wish to be strong, that sudden overflow in the soul where thoughts loose their hold on each other and swim single and helpless in the flood of emotion,— women know what it is!

No doubt she was a little frightened and a good deal bewildered, and that her sympathies were warmly excited for a friend to whom she had been brought so near, and whose loneliness she saw and pitied. She lost that calm self-possession she had hoped to maintain.

"If I thought that I could make you happy,— if I should speak from my heart, and not my reason,— I am but a weak woman,— yet if I can be to you —— What can I say?"

What more could this poor, dear Helen say?

"Elbridge, harness the horses and take Miss Darley back to the school."

What conversation had taken place since Helen's rhetorical failure is not recorded in the minutes from which this narrative is constructed. But when the man who had been summoned had gone to get the carriage ready, Helen resumed something she had been speaking of.

"Not for the world! Everything must go on just as it has gone on, for the present. There are proprieties to be consulted. I cannot be hard with you, that out of your very affliction has

sprung this — this — well — you must name it for me, — but the world will never listen to explanations. I am to be Helen Darley, lady assistant in Mr. Silas Peckham's school, as long as I see fit to hold my office. And I mean to attend to my scholars just as before; so that I shall have very little time for visiting or seeing company. I believe, though, you are one of the Trustees and a Member of the Examining Committee; so that, if you should happen to visit the school, I shall try to be civil to you."

Every lady sees, of course, that Helen was quite right; but perhaps here and there one will think that Dudley Venner was all wrong, — that he was too hasty, — that he should have been too full of his recent grief for such a confession as he has just made, and the passion from which it sprung. Perhaps they do not understand the sudden recoil of a strong nature long compressed. Perhaps they have not studied the mystery of *allotropism* in the emotions of the human heart. Go to the nearest chemist and ask him to show you some of the dark-red phosphorus which will not burn without fierce heating, but at 500°, Fahrenheit, changes back again to the inflammable substance we know so well. Grief seems more like ashes than like fire; but as grief has been love once, so it may become love again. This is emotional allotropism.

Helen rode back to the Institute and inquired for Mr. Peckham. She had not seen him during

the brief interval between her departure from the mansion-house and her return to Old Sophy's funeral. There were various questions about the school she wished to ask.

"Oh, how's your haälth, Miss Darley?" Silas began. "We've missed you consid'able. Glad to see you back at the post of dooty. Hope the Squire treated you hahnsomely, — liberal pecooniary compensation, — hey? A'n't much of a loser, I guess, by acceptin' his propositions?"

Helen blushed at this last question, as if Silas had meant something by it beyond asking what money she had received; but his own double-meaning expression and her blush were too nice points for him to have taken cognizance of. He was engaged in a mental calculation as to the amount of the deduction he should make under the head of "demage to the institootion," — this depending somewhat on that of the "pecooniary compensation" she might have received for her services as the friend of Elsie Venner.

So Helen slid back at once into her routine, the same faithful, patient creature she had always been. But what was this new light which seemed to have kindled in her eyes? What was this look of peace, which nothing could disturb, which smiled serenely through all the little meannesses with which the daily life of the educational factory surrounded her, — which not only made her seem resigned, but overflowed all her features with a thoughtful, subdued happiness? Mr.

Bernard did not know, — perhaps he did not guess. The inmates of the Dudley mansion were not scandalized by any mysterious visits of a veiled or unveiled lady. The vibrating tongues of the "female youth" of the Institute were not set in motion by the standing of an equipage at the gate, waiting for their lady teacher. The servants at the mansion did not convey numerous letters with superscriptions in a bold, manly hand, sealed with the arms of a well-known house, and directed to Miss Helen Darley; nor, on the other hand, did Hiram, the man from the lean streak in New Hampshire, carry sweet-smelling, rose-hued, many-layered, criss-crossed, fine-stitch-lettered packages of note-paper directed to Dudley Venner, Esq., and all too scanty to hold that incredible expansion of the famous three words which a woman was born to say, — that perpetual miracle which astonishes all the go-betweens who wear their shoes out in carrying a woman's infinite variations on the theme, "I love you."

But the reader must remember that there are walks in country-towns where people are liable to meet by accident, and that the hollow of an old tree has served the purpose of a post-office sometimes; so that he has her choice (to divide the pronouns impartially) of various hypotheses to account for the new glory of happiness which seemed to have irradiated our poor Helen's features, as if her dreary life were awakening in the dawn of a blessed future.

With all the alleviations which have been hinted at, Mr. Dudley Venner thought that the days and the weeks had never moved so slowly as through the last period of the autumn that was passing. Elsie had been a perpetual source of anxiety to him, but still she had been a companion. He could not mourn for her; for he felt that she was safer with her mother, in that world where there are no more sorrows and dangers, than she could have been with him. But as he sat at his window and looked at the three mounds, the loneliness of the great house made it seem more like the sepulchre than these narrow dwellings where his beloved and her daughter lay close to each other, side by side, — Catalina, the bride of his youth, and Elsie, the child whom he had nurtured, with poor Old Sophy, who had followed them like a black shadow, at their feet, under the same soft turf, sprinkled with the brown autumnal leaves. It was not good for him to be thus alone. How should he ever live through the long months of November and December?

The months of November and December did, in some way or other, get rid of themselves at last, bringing with them the usual events of village-life and a few unusual ones. Some of the geologists had been up to look at the great slide, of which they gave those prolix accounts which everybody remembers who read the scientific journals of the time. The engineers re-

ported that there was little probability of any further convulsion along the line of rocks which overhung the more thickly settled part of the town. The naturalists drew up a paper on the "Probable Extinction of the *Crotalus Durissus* in the Township of Rockland." The engagement of the Widow Rowens to a Little Millionville merchant was announced, — "Sudding 'n' onexpected," Widow Leech said, — "waälthy, or she wouldn't ha' looked at him, — fifty year old, if he is a day, *'n' ha'n't got a white hair in his head.*" The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather had publicly announced that he was going to join the Roman Catholic communion, — not so much to the surprise or consternation of the religious world as he had supposed. Several old ladies forthwith proclaimed their intention of following him; but, as one or two of them were deaf, and another had been threatened with an attack of that mild, but obstinate complaint, *dementia senilis*, many thought it was not so much the force of his arguments as a kind of tendency to jump as the bellwether jumps, well known in flocks not included in the Christian fold. His bereaved congregation immediately began pulling candidates on and off, like new boots, on trial. Some pinched in tender places; some were too loose; some were too square-toed; some were too coarse, and didn't please; some were too thin, and wouldn't last; — in short, they couldn't possibly find a fit. At last

people began to drop in to hear old Doctor Honeywood. They were quite surprised to find what a human old gentleman he was, and went back and told the others, that, instead of being a case of confluent sectarianism, as they supposed, the good old minister had been so well vaccinated with charitable virus that he was now a true, open-souled Christian of the mildest type. The end of all which was, that the liberal people went over to the old minister almost in a body, just at the time that Deacon Shearer and the "Vinegar-Bible" party split off, and that not long afterwards they sold their own meeting-house to the malecontents, so that Deacon Soper used often to remind Colonel Sprowle of his wish that "our little man and him [the Reverend Doctor] would swop pulpits," and tell him it had "pooty nigh come trew." — But this is anticipating the course of events, which were much longer in coming about; for we have but just got through that terrible long month, as Mr. Dudley Venner found it, of December.

On the first of January, Mr. Silas Peckham was in the habit of settling his quarterly accounts, and making such new arrangements as his convenience or interest dictated. New-Year was a holiday at the Institute. No doubt this accounted for Helen's being dressed so charmingly, — always, to be sure, in her own simple way, but yet with such a true lady's air, that she looked fit to be the mistress of any mansion in the land.

She was in the parlor alone, a little before noon, when Mr. Peckham came in.

"I'm ready to settle my accaount with you now, Miss Darley," said Silas.

"As you please, Mr. Peckham," Helen answered, very graciously.

"Before payin' you your selary," the Principal continued, "I wish to come to an understandin' as to the futur'. I consider that I've been payin' high, very high, for the work you do. Women's wages can't be expected to do more than feed and clothe 'em, as a gineral thing, with a little savin', in case of sickness, and to bury 'em, if they break daown, as all of 'em are liable to do at any time. If I a'n't misinformed, you not only support yourself out of my establishment, but likewise relatives of yours, who I don't know that I'm called upon to feed and clothe. There is a young woman, not burdened with destitute relatives, has signified that she would be glad to take your dooties for less pecooniary compensation, by a consid'able amaount, than you now receive. I shall be willin', however, to retain your services at sech redooced rate as we shall fix upon, — provided sech redooced rate be as low or lower than the same services can be obtained elsewhere."

"As you please, Mr. Peckham," Helen answered, with a smile so sweet that the Principal (who of course had trumped up this opposition-teacher for the occasion) said to himself she would

stand being cut down a quarter, perhaps a half, of her salary.

"Here is your accaount, Miss Darley, and the balance doo you," said Silas Peckham, handing her a paper and a small roll of infectious-flavored bills wrapping six poisonous coppers of the old coinage.

She took the paper and began looking at it. She could not quite make up her mind to touch the feverish bills with the cankering coppers in them, and left them airing themselves on the table.

The document she held ran as follows:

Silas Peckham, Esq., Principal of the Apollinean Institute, In Account with Helen Darley, Assist. Teacher.

Dr.		*Cr.*	
To Salary for quarter ending Jan. 1st, @ $75 per quarter .	$75.00	By Deduction for absence, 1 week 3 days	$10.00
		" Board, lodging, etc., for 10 days, @ 75 cts. per day . . .	7.50
		" Damage to Institution by absence of teacher from duties, say	25.00
		" Stationery furnished	43
		" Postage-stamp . .	01
		" Balance due Helen Darley	32.06
	$75.00		$75.00

ROCKLAND, Jan. 1st, 1859.

Now Helen had her own private reasons for

wishing to receive the small sum which was due her at this time without any unfair deduction, — reasons which we need not inquire into too particularly, as we may be very sure that they were right and womanly. So, when she looked over this account of Mr. Silas Peckham's, and saw that he had contrived to pare down her salary to something less than half its stipulated amount, the look which her countenance wore was as near to that of righteous indignation as her gentle features and soft blue eyes would admit of its being.

"Why, Mr. Peckham," she said, "do you mean this? If I am of so much value to you that you must take off twenty-five dollars for ten days' absence, how is it that my salary is to be cut down to less than seventy-five dollars a quarter, if I remain here?"

"I gave you fair notice," said Silas. "I have a minute of it I took down immed'ately after the intervoo."

He lugged out his large pocket-book with the strap going all round it, and took from it a slip of paper which confirmed his statement.

"Besides," he added, slyly, "I presoom you have received a liberal pecooniary compensation from Squire Venner for nussin' his daughter."

Helen was looking over the bill while he was speaking.

"Board and lodging for ten days, Mr. Peckham, — *whose* board and lodging, pray?"

The door opened before Silas Peckham could answer, and Mr. Bernard walked into the parlor. Helen was holding the bill in her hand, looking as any woman ought to look who has been at once wronged and insulted.

"The last turn of the thumbscrew!" said Mr. Bernard to himself. "What is it, Helen? You look troubled."

She handed him the account.

He looked at the footing of it. Then he looked at the items. Then he looked at Silas Peckham.

At this moment Silas was sublime. He was so transcendently unconscious of the emotions going on in Mr. Bernard's mind at the moment, that he had only a single thought.

"The accaount's correc'ly cast, I presoom; — if the' 's any mistake of figgers or addin' 'em up, it'll be made all right. Everything's accordin' to agreement. The minute written immed'ately after the intervoo is here in my possession."

Mr. Bernard looked at Helen. Just what would have happened to Silas Peckham, as he stood then and there, but for the interposition of a merciful Providence, nobody knows or ever will know; for at that moment steps were heard upon the stairs, and Hiram threw open the parlor-door for Mr. Dudley Venner to enter.

He saluted them all gracefully with the good-wishes of the season, and each of them returned his compliment, — Helen blushing fearfully, of

course, but not particularly noticed in her embarrassment by more than one.

Silas Peckham reckoned with perfect confidence on his Trustees, who had always said what he told them to, and done what he wanted. It was a good chance now to show off his power, and, by letting his instructors know the unstable tenure of their offices, make it easier to settle his accounts and arrange his salaries. There was nothing very strange in Mr. Venner's calling; he was one of the Trustees, and this was New Year's Day. But he had called just at the lucky moment for Mr. Peckham's object.

"I have thought some of makin' changes in the department of instruction," he began. "Several accomplished teachers have applied to me, who would be glad of sitooations. I understand that there never have been so many fust-rate teachers, male and female, out of employment as doorin' the present season. If I can make sahtisfahctory arrangements with my present corpse of teachers, I shall be glad to do so; otherwise I shell, with the permission of the Trustees, make sech noo arrangements as circumstahnces compel."

"You may make arrangements for a new assistant in my department, Mr. Peckham," said Mr. Bernard, "at once, — this day, — this hour. I am not safe to be trusted with your person five minutes out of this lady's presence, — of whom I beg pardon for this strong language. Mr. Ven-

ner, I must beg you, as one of the Trustees of this Institution, to look at the manner in which its Principal has attempted to swindle this faithful teacher, whose toils and sacrifices and self-devotion to the school have made it all that it is, in spite of this miserable trader's incompetence. Will you look at the paper I hold?"

Dudley Venner took the account and read it through, without changing a feature. Then he turned to Silas Peckham.

"You may make arrangements for a new assistant in the branches this lady has taught. Miss Helen Darley is to be my wife. I had hoped to have announced this news in a less abrupt and ungraceful manner. But I came to tell you with my own lips what you would have learned before evening from my friends in the village."

Mr. Bernard went to Helen, who stood silent, with downcast eyes, and took her hand warmly, hoping she might find all the happiness she deserved. Then he turned to Dudley Venner, and said,—

"She is a queen, but has never found it out. The world has nothing nobler than this dear woman, whom you have discovered in the disguise of a teacher. God bless her and you!"

Dudley Venner returned his friendly grasp, without answering a word in articulate speech.

Silas remained dumb and aghast for a brief space. Coming to himself a little, he thought there might have been some mistake about the

items, — would like to have Miss Darley's bill returned, — would make it all right, — had no idea that Squire Venner had a special int'rest in Miss Darley, — was sorry he had given offence, — if he might take that bill and look it over ——

"No, Mr. Peckham," said Mr. Dudley Venner; "there will be a full meeting of the Board next week, and the bill, and such evidence with reference to the management of the Institution and the treatment of its instructors as Mr. Langdon sees fit to bring forward will be laid before them."

Miss Helen Darley became that very day the guest of Miss Arabella Thornton, the Judge's daughter. Mr. Bernard made his appearance a week or two later at the Lectures, where the Professor first introduced him to the reader.

He stayed after the class had left the room.

"Ah, Mr. Langdon! how do you do? Very glad to see you back again. How have you been since our correspondence on Fascination and other curious scientific questions?"

It was the Professor who spoke, — whom the reader will recognize as myself, the teller of this story.

"I have been well," Mr. Bernard answered, with a serious look which invited a further question.

"I hope you have had none of those painful or dangerous experiences you seemed to be think-

ing of when you wrote; at any rate, you have escaped having your obituary written."

"I have seen some things worth remembering. Shall I call on you this evening and tell you about them?"

"I shall be most happy to see you."

This was the way in which I, the Professor, became acquainted with some of the leading events of this story. They interested me sufficiently to lead me to avail myself of all those other extraordinary methods of obtaining information well known to writers of narrative.

Mr. Langdon seemed to me to have gained in seriousness and strength of character by his late experiences. He threw his whole energies into his studies with an effect which distanced all his previous efforts. Remembering my former hint, he employed his spare hours in writing for the annual prizes, both of which he took by a unanimous vote of the judges. Those who heard him read his Thesis at the Medical Commencement will not soon forget the impression made by his fine personal appearance and manners, nor the universal interest excited in the audience, as he read, with his beautiful enunciation, that striking paper entitled "Unresolved Nebulæ in Vital Science." It was a general remark of the Faculty, — and old Doctor Kittredge, who had come down on purpose to hear Mr. Langdon, heartily agreed to it, — that there had never been a diploma filled

up, since the institution which conferred upon him the degree of *Doctor Medicinæ* was founded, which carried with it more of promise to the profession than that which bore the name of

Bernardus Caryl Langdon.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

Mr. Bernard Langdon had no sooner taken his degree, than, in accordance with the advice of one of his teachers whom he frequently consulted, he took an office in the heart of the city where he had studied. He had thought of beginning in a suburb or some remoter district of the city proper.

"No," said his teacher, — to wit, myself, — "don't do any such thing. You are made for the best kind of practice; don't hamper yourself with an outside constituency, such as belongs to a practitioner of the second class. When a fellow like you chooses his beat, he must look ahead a little. Take care of all the poor that apply to you, but leave the half-pay classes to a different style of doctor, — the people who spend one half their time in taking care of their patients, and the other half in squeezing out their money. Go for the swell-fronts and south-exposure houses; the folks inside are just as good as other people, and the pleasantest, on the whole, to take care of. They must have somebody, and they like a gentleman best. Don't throw yourself away. You

have a good presence and pleasing manners. You wear white linen by inherited instinct. You can pronounce the word *view*. You have all the elements of success; go and take it. Be polite and generous, but don't undervalue yourself. You will be useful, at any rate; you may just as well be happy, while you are about it. The highest social class furnishes incomparably the best patients, taking them by and large. Besides, when they won't get well and bore you to death, you can send 'em off to travel. Mind me now, and take the tops of your sparrowgrass. Somebody must have 'em, — why shouldn't you? If you don't take your chance, you'll get the butt-ends as a matter of course."

Mr. Bernard talked like a young man full of noble sentiments. He wanted to be useful to his fellow-beings. Their social differences were nothing to him. He would never court the rich, — he would go where he was called. He would rather save the life of a poor mother of a family than that of half a dozen old gouty millionnaires whose heirs had been yawning and stretching these ten years to get rid of them.

"Generous emotions!" I exclaimed. "Cherish 'em; cling to 'em till you are fifty, till you are seventy, till you are ninety! But do as I tell you, — strike for the best circle of practice, and you'll be sure to get it!"

Mr. Langdon did as I told him, — took a genteel office, furnished it neatly, dressed with a

certain elegance, soon made a pleasant circle of acquaintances, and began to work his way into the right kind of business. I missed him, however, for some days, not long after he had opened his office. On his return, he told me he had been up at Rockland, by special invitation, to attend the wedding of Mr. Dudley Venner and Miss Helen Darley. He gave me a full account of the ceremony, which I regret that I cannot relate in full. "Helen looked like an angel," — that, I am sure, was one of his expressions. As for her dress, I should like to give the details, but am afraid of committing blunders, as men always do, when they undertake to describe such matters. White dress, anyhow, — that I am sure of, — with orange-flowers, and the most wonderful lace veil that was ever seen or heard of. The Reverend Doctor Honeywood performed the ceremony, of course. The good people seemed to have forgotten they ever had had any other minister, — except Deacon Shearer and his set of malecontents, who were doing a dull business in the meeting-house lately occupied by the Reverend Mr. Fairweather.

"Who was at the wedding?"

"Everybody, pretty much. They wanted to keep it quiet, but it was of no use. Married at church. Front pews, old Doctor Kittredge and all the mansion-house people and distinguished strangers, — Colonel Sprowle and family, including Matilda's young gentleman, a graduate of one of the fresh-water colleges, — Mrs. Pickins

(late Widow Rowens) and husband, — Deacon Soper and numerous parishioners. A little nearer the door, Abel, the Doctor's man, and Elbridge, who drove them to church in the family-coach. Father Fairweather, as they all call him now, came in late with Father McShane."

"And Silas Peckham?"

"Oh, Silas had left The School and Rockland. Cut up altogether too badly in the examination instituted by the Trustees. Had removed over to Tamarack, and thought of renting a large house and 'farming' the town-poor."

Some time after this, as I was walking with a young friend along by the swell-fronts and south-exposures, whom should I see but Mr. Bernard Langdon, looking remarkably happy, and keeping step by the side of a very handsome and singularly well-dressed young lady? He bowed and lifted his hat as we passed.

"Who is that pretty girl my young doctor has got there?" I said to my companion.

"Who is that?" he answered. "You don't know? Why, that is neither more nor less than Miss Letitia Forrester, daughter of — of — why, the great banking-firm, you know, Bilyuns Brothers & Forrester. Got acquainted with her in the country, they say. There's a story that they're engaged, or like to be, if the firm consents."

"Oh!" I said.

I did not like the look of it in the least. Too young, — too young. Has not taken any position

yet. No right to ask for the hand of Bilyuns Brothers & Co.'s daughter. Besides, it will spoil him for practice, if he marries a rich girl before he has formed habits of work.

I looked in at his office the next day. A box of white kids was lying open on the table. A three-cornered note, directed in a very delicate lady's-hand, was distinguishable among a heap of papers. I was just going to call him to account for his proceedings, when he pushed the three-cornered note aside and took up a letter with a great corporation-seal upon it. He had received the offer of a professor's chair in an ancient and distinguished institution.

"Pretty well for three-and-twenty, my boy," I said. "I suppose you'll think you must be married one of these days, if you accept this office."

Mr. Langdon blushed. — There had been stories about him, he knew. His name had been mentioned in connection with that of a very charming young lady. The current reports were not true. He had met this young lady, and been much pleased with her, in the country, at the house of her grandfather, the Reverend Doctor Honeywood, — you remember Miss Letitia Forrester, whom I have mentioned repeatedly? On coming to town, he found his country-acquaintance in a social position which seemed to discourage his continued intimacy. He had discovered, however, that he was a not unwelcome visitor, and had kept up friendly relations with

her. But there was no truth in the current reports, — none at all.

Some months had passed, after this visit, when I happened one evening to stroll into a box in one of the principal theatres of the city. A small party sat on the seats before me: a middle-aged gentleman and his lady, in front, and directly behind them my young doctor and the same very handsome young lady I had seen him walking with on the sidewalk before the swell-fronts and south-exposures. As Professor Langdon seemed to be very much taken up with his companion, and both of them looked as if they were enjoying themselves, I determined not to make my presence known to my young friend, and to withdraw quietly after feasting my eyes with the sight of them for a few minutes.

"It looks as if something might come of it," I said to myself. At that moment the young lady lifted her arm accidentally in such a way that the light fell upon the clasp of a chain which encircled her wrist. My eyes filled with tears as I read upon the clasp, in sharp-cut Italic letters, *E. V.* They were tears at once of sad remembrance and of joyous anticipation; for the ornament on which I looked was the double pledge of a dead sorrow and a living affection. It was the golden bracelet, — the parting-gift of Elsie Venner.

THE END.

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